

Op/Ed

COUNCIL, POLICE WORKING TO STOP VIOLENCE

By **Ann Johnston**

January 08, 2012

Stockton Mayor

Last May I announced that the city would develop a Marshall Plan to address community crime issues. Since then it has been mischaracterized as the solution for everything that plagues our city.

The council adopted four major goals and 37 strategic initiatives to accomplish these goals, one of which was the Marshall Plan. Each initiative is on its own timeline, some are simpler to do while others are more complicated involving other community partners.

The issue of crime has always been at the top of our list. None of our goals, including improving public safety, can be accomplished without a balanced budget. Over 80 percent of our city budget is for public safety, and we successfully adopted a balanced budget that saw \$37 million in cuts without eliminating one single police officer position — a first in the last few budget years.

We have already taken aggressive action to improve the safety of our city. We have secured over \$8 million in federal COPS grant money to conduct targeted police missions and hire 17 new police officers. We have received over 1,500 applications for 42 vacant police officer positions and have 13 people working to process these applications and get more officers on our streets as soon as possible.

The Stockton Police Department, through the use of technology, is able to identify crime “hot spots” and efficiently and effectively place resources where and when crime is occurring. They are focusing on the worst criminals and drug and gang issues — the causes for the majority of violent crimes. Their ongoing partnership with other local, state and federal agencies has provided as many as 50 to 60 members of law enforcement actively working on specific issues in the community. In just two police operations, we arrested more than 30 of the worst offenders. We also are using our award winning Peacekeepers to assist in preventing gang retaliation and breaking the generational cycle of gangs.

Unfortunately, our city has experienced high crime for years. We will not make change based on sensationalized reporting and demands for superficial action. We are conducting a methodical, honest evaluation of our community that will involve key participants and stakeholders in the criminal justice system. The city is just one participant in this issue. San Joaquin County spends more than twice what Stockton spends on criminal justice issues. The District Attorney and Sheriff Offices, the Probation Department, and the Courts are key participants. Our schools, our churches, and our non-profit organizations all have a stake in this issue.

The city cannot take lasting action in a vacuum. Stockton's Marshall Plan will go beyond the development of a document that just sits on a shelf. It must be a transformation of our city, addressing and unraveling trends and issues that developed over decades. We are in the first phase of this major project — the Readiness Assessment Phase. Like the Marshall Plan of post-World War II, with planning and agreement from independent major stakeholders, we will have long-term success.

What will be different from the historical Marshall Plan is that there will be no third party coming to our aid, offering enormous financial resources and troops on the ground, as the United States provided to European nations. We must find the solutions from within our city and seek assistance from any and all available resources.

We understand and share the frustration that we must find quick solutions to our crime problem. However, there is no single plan, there is no single solution that is controlled by the city that will result in immediate change. We urge

our citizens to take action by protecting themselves and their property from crime and help police by reporting crimes and providing information to police that will help solve crimes.

Our neighborhoods have the greatest potential for fighting crime through neighborhood watch programs. We are all in this together — individually and collectively we share the responsibility for improving the safety of our city.

The city has a plan, your City Council has demonstrated the courage, and we now have to bring together our community partners to take on this issue that has blighted Stockton's reputation for years.

This will not happen overnight. The changes we are seeking must have lasting effects for generations to come and create a transformation within our community. Working together we can make it happen.

Ann Johnston is mayor of Stockton.