



Guinta slams Lynch, says governor is scrambling for cover

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MANCHESTER – Mayor Frank Guinta said last night he is not satisfied with Gov. John Lynch's efforts to help coordinate the state and city response to recent violent crime in the city.

Speaking after a televised debate between Lynch and his Republican challenger Jim Coburn, Guinta said he had not met with the governor until Monday on the crime issue, noting the governor appears to be scrambling for cover.

"People want to see leadership. I'm not satisfied in the manner this governor announced this information. It's about time we had a comprehensive public safety plan," Guinta said.

At last night's debate, Lynch said of state and city efforts within Manchester to curtail crime: "I met with officials Monday and came back Wednesday with a very quick response."



Earlier in the day, Guinta said the state's southern tier needs to organize and apply political pressure in Concord to attract more public safety dollars and ensure hard-line judges are appointed to the bench.

Speaking at a breakfast meeting of the Queen City Rotary Club, Guinta said he will lead those efforts as part of a six-point plan to revitalize Manchester.

Guinta spoke largely in generalities, but called for a "litmus test" for anyone seeking a judgeship in the state.

Queen City Rotary Club President Rick Borraza, left, talks with Mayor Frank Guinta yesterday at the Back Room Restaurant after the mayor outlined his six-point plan to revitalize Manchester. (DICK MORIN)

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That comment came in the wake of Wednesday's bail reductions in Nashua District Court for two people linked to the man accused of murdering city police Officer Michael Briggs last week.

Judge Michael Ryan reduced the bail of Antoine Bell-Rogers from \$200,000 to \$150,000 cash, and Judge Lawrence A. MacLeod reduced the bail of Teresia Shipley from \$100,000 to \$80,000 cash or surety.

"That's offensive to me," said Guinta. "Those two individuals were on a crime spree, allegedly, with Michael Addison."

Addison has been implicated in Briggs' murder. He is fighting his return to New Hampshire and is being held on \$2 million cash bail in Massachusetts.

Guinta called for stricter laws and longer sentences for people convicted of violent crimes.

The mayor said the group he envisions -- the Southern New Hampshire Regional Commission to Stop Crime -- would meet regularly to share intelligence on crime and lobby the Legislature for more federal and state money.

"It's long overdue," said Guinta, adding that he's been discussing the idea with police chiefs and political leaders throughout the southern tier for months.

People working in courthouses and the State House need to work alongside, not against, municipal leaders, he said.

"I was involved in the last legislative session," said Guinta, "and I'll be far more involved in the next session. (Judicial) opinions are granting criminals more rights, and that has to stop. We have to have a litmus test."

Police Chief John Jaskolka, who attended the speech at the Puritan Backroom Restaurant, said political support to adequately staff his department is "finally being recognized."

Manchester's force numbers 215, and the department has money to hire 10 more officers. The major obstacle now, said Jaskolka, is finding qualified people to put in uniform.

Ten years ago, he said, 500 people may have turned out for a police recruiting drive. The most recent session drew 68 people, and from that group 10 are going through background checks. Jaskolka said he hopes to be able to offer them jobs Nov. 27.

Public safety was one aspect of Guinta's six-point plan.

Others include:

Housing. A citywide housing plan needs to be "fast-tracked," said Guinta, to encourage more local homeownership and to refurbish blighted areas.

He praised the mid-1990s work of Neighborhood Housing Services, recently renamed NeighborWorks Greater Manchester, and pledged to work closely with that group, the Manchester Housing & Redevelopment Authority and the New Hampshire Finance Authority.

Sean Thomas, the mayor's senior aide, said the city has also been asked to be part of a chamber of commerce panel on housing.

Any comprehensive housing plan would need the approval of aldermen, said Thomas, and the mayor hopes to have a proposal ready before the end of the calendar year.

Neighborhood enforcement. Guinta pointed to the city's 20 neighborhood watch groups and said those efforts must be encouraged.

"The city will not rest until we can be proud of every neighborhood in the city," he said.

Youth services. The mayor said he want to establish a "Manchester Youth Violence Intervention Team" which would fight existing gangs and offer support to parents of at-risk kids.

Guinta said that work must also be regional in scope and be subject to ongoing evaluation. The public, he said, must be kept informed on the level of youth violence in the city and what's being done about it.

The "intervention team" name, said Thomas, is taken from the title of a document prepared recently by the city's Office of Youth Services. He said Martin Boldin, youth services director, will lead that group.

Economic development. As Manchester works on issues like public safety, Guinta said its leaders must maintain a positive public message. Business and political leaders, he said, have to continue to promote the local and regional economies and focus on job growth.

Education. Guinta said he believes city children get an adequate education now, but that is not enough. "I would rather try something new and fail, than do nothing," he said.

The mayor said he will work closely with Fred Bramante, a member of the State Board of Education and a city business owner, to push for "new ways to deliver education."

"We need to personalize learning for every single student," said Bramante, in a telephone interview. "That means giving ownership of the learning to the student, and that includes them having a major say in what they learn and whether that learning takes place inside or outside the school, during the day or night, weekdays or weekends."

Bramante, who serves on the committee studying the future of West High School, said he envisions an education overhaul that "will change the role of teachers into coaches, facilitators and mentors of students."

Guinta declined to endorse specific educational strategies before first proposing them to the school board.

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