

TODAY'S NEWSMAKERS



GAVIN NEWSOM

San Francisco's mayor is helping to launch a voter registration drive through text messaging that targets young Latino voters. Using technology offered by Mobile Voter, organizations can use cell phone text-messaging to register voters, for free, at www.txtvoter.org. "Nothing is as cutting edge or clever in the field of grassroots mobilization," Newsom said.

Newsom



NANCY PELOSI

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich said Wednesday that the thought of the House minority leader becoming the next speaker of the House is frightening. Gingrich criticized her "San Francisco values" and foreign policy stances. A Pelosi spokesperson called the comments fear-mongering. The Democrats need to gain 15 seats to regain control of the House.

Pelosi



A program initially started 10 years ago during the administration of Mayor Willie Brown is being revitalized. The City will hire residents from low-income neighborhoods to patrol Muni buses and monitor passenger behavior. —Examiner file photo

Muni to boost bus patrol program

Hired monitors to ride buses to curb vandalism, fights

By Bonnie Eslinger
Staff Writer

A program that puts young adults on Muni buses to curb vandalism and defuse conflicts is being revitalized, according to city officials.

Muni's Transit Assistants Program, or MTAP, hires residents from San Francisco's low-income neighborhoods; provides them with several weeks of training — including 40 hours of conflict-resolution instruction from the San Francisco Police Department — and then pays them \$11 per hour to ride on select buses and monitor passenger behavior.

The unarmed patrol members wear black jackets or yellow vests with the words "Muni Transit Assistants" on the backside, along with a shirt and an MTA badge — a uniform that's different than what's worn by the operators.

The behavior and safety of youth

on San Francisco's public transportation system has long been the subject of debate and question, particularly since The City's public school system has for several decades operated under a federal desegregation order that resulted in students being bused to different parts of The City. A range of highly publicized attacks involving youths, on buses or near bus stops, have fueled the fires of concern.

Started 10 years ago, during the administration of former Mayor Willie Brown, the MTAP initially drew criticism, because some members of the original 32-person youth squad were ex-gang members. However, the MTAP was also credited with decreasing incidents of violence and graffiti on the three bus lines it was charged to monitor.

However, the program is now down to nine staff members who are stretched out over at least eight lines, including the 9-San Bruno, 14-Mission, 15-Third Street, 22-Fillmore, 24-Divisadero, 30-Stockton, 38-Geary, and 48-Quintara/24th Street, as well as other bus lines during the after-school hours.

Supervisor Bevan Dufty, a for-

mer aide to Brown, said he recently began pushing Muni to revive the MTAP program.

"I felt like the program has dwindled," Dufty said. "I think many of our public schools have students who face issues getting home safely."

Approximately 15 additional patrol monitors will be hired to ride the buses, confirmed Muni spokeswoman Maggie Lynch.

The MTAP monitors ride in the back of the bus. According to Muni officials, they are allowed to break up fights if no weapons are involved and confiscate graffiti objects from passengers caught in the act of vandalizing coaches. The MTAP monitors do not have the authority to make arrests.

San Francisco's interim Superintendent, Gwen Chan, said she's worked closely with Muni and the MTAP and gave the program high praise.

"I can't say enough about the [program]," Chan said. "The more help we can get ensuring the safe passage of our kids to and from school, the better."

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Alleged car thief tries to flee by jumping into Bay

By Joshua Sabatini
Staff Writer

A 36-year-old alleged thief tried to flee from police Wednesday night by jumping into San Francisco Bay.

San Francisco police responded to a call at 11:40 p.m. about a man having broken into a car parked along the 3700 block of Fillmore Street. When police arrived, they saw the thief inside a Chevy Tahoe, which he allegedly broke into.

"As the police were coming up, he sees them and he takes off running," Sgt. Neville Gittens said.

The man then jumped into the water near the Golden

Gate Yacht Club and started swimming out into the Bay.

The San Francisco Police Department then requested assistance from the U.S. Coast Guard, according to Coast Guard Petty Officer Danielle Kouture.

A Coast Guard boat from Station Golden Gate was launched at 12:02 a.m., and while en route they received information that the person was unarmed, Kouture said. "He was on board by 12:18 a.m. At 12:25 a.m. Station Golden Gate transferred the subject into the custody of the SFPD," she said.

The thief was charged with one count of felony auto burglary, according to Gittens.

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KEN GARCIA *The voice of The City*

For answer to homicide wave, look to revolving-door justice

The randomness of the violence in San Francisco this year has proved beyond vexing for the experts. A man gets behind the wheel of a car and starts mowing down pedestrians with casual indifference. Bullets fly in the Bayview district over the weekend as if the Wild West were very much alive, leaving five more people dead.

So here in our capital of finger-pointing, someone's got to get the blame — the police, the mayor, the district attorney. What about the judges who let so many felons walk the streets? The real civil libertarians would talk about the nation's social, economic and education system and the cyclic patterns that keep families in poverty and steer individuals toward crime.

And there's always President Bush to kick around, cutting funding for more police officers and public housing grants, while driving up record deficits to pay for his war doctrine.

No one can say for sure what is really propelling the surges in violence that have claimed 62 lives in The City so far this year, but there is a common thread that should be at the root of any discussion. And that is that there are a lot more bad guys on the streets these days and they are armed to the teeth — and our local system of justice is failing to deal with it.

The truth is, far too many people in the city and county of San Francisco are getting a stay out of jail pass, and when they are out they're engaging in a lot of unsavory activities that often make them murder targets. Before this last weekend's bloodshed in the Bayview, there were 57 murders in San Francisco. Among the victims, 43 of them had piled up a total of 732 felony and 508 misdemeanor charges — everything from homicide, aggravated assault, narcotic sales and possession of assault weapons to burglary.

So while a lot of elected officials are blaming the Police Department for failing to halt the wave of violence, it's clear that they're making a lot of arrests and getting a lot of guns off the street — more than 1,200 alone last year. But the arrests don't necessarily translate into incarceration, where prosecutors and judges appear to be all too forgiving. And that's been a trend now for a decade.

"The criminal justice system has failed these victims," Deputy Chief Morris Tabak told me.

The statistics bear him out. According to figures compiled by the state Department of Corrections, San Francisco sent 1,412 felons to state prison in 1995. Five years later that figure had dropped to 581, a decrease of more than 40 percent. Our bumbling hometown hero, Terence Hallinan, took over the District Attorney's Office and the whole concept of crime fighting really took a tumble.

In 2001, after Hallinan had achieved the dubious honor of having the lowest conviction rate in the entire state of California, San Francisco sent 393 felons to prison. By 2003, that figure had dipped to 338

when Hallinan was more focused on sending the command staff of the Police Department to jail rather than those individuals we generally identify as criminals.

Since Kamala Harris has been district attorney that figure has improved slightly — 436 felons were sent to prison last year — but clearly the bent toward leniency and discharging cases "in the interest of justice" continues.

Comparisons with other counties don't do San Francisco justice. Santa Barbara, hardly a conservative bastion, which has a population roughly half our size, sent nearly 900 convicted felons to prison last year. Even tiny Yolo County, with 180,000 residents, sent 512 people packing.

I'm not advocating a prison-first policy, and I believe in second and third chances, and sometimes beyond. But it's obvious that there's a correlation between the number of felons convicted of serious and violent crimes walking our streets and the escalating homicide rate that has City Hall in a tizzy.

So perhaps all those so-called progressive politicians — and the voters who elect them — who talk about social justice and the root causes of violence may want to consider the facts before they rev up the tired rhetoric.

It's worth noting that when the ever-progressive Hallinan was trying to defend his record as the worst district attorney in the state, he blamed it partly on liberal judges and juries. Even if one were too believe that, it would just underscore that the criminal justice system — at least the one that exists in San Francisco — is failing to protect people by sending known criminals back on the streets.

And that's where all those plea bargains and light probation sentences and outright dismissals become homicide statistics.



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