

Police Supt. Weis: National Guard isn't solution to city's gun violence State Reps. Fritchey and Ford want National Guard's help fighting crime

April 25, 2010

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Chicago Police Supt. Jody Weis today spoke out against a request for the Illinois National Guard to be deployed on Chicago's streets to help tackle gun violence.

Stopping just short of outright rejecting the request from state lawmakers Rep. John Fritchey and Rep. LaShawn Ford, Weis said "I don't think the National Guard is the solution."

At a press conference earlier Sunday, Fritchey and Ford had called on Gov. Quinn and Mayor Daley to deploy troops. The action, in coordination with Weis, should be taken as soon as possible to help get guns and criminals off the street, they said.

The two Chicago Democrats noted National Guard members are now working side-by-side with U.S. troops to fight wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, while another deadly war is taking place in Chicago neighborhoods.

"Is calling for National Guard deployment a drastic action? Of course it is," said Fritchey. "Is it warranted under these circumstances? Without question. If we can bring (the National Guard) in to help fill sandbags for flooding... to deal with tornado debris, we can bring them in to save lives."

So far this year, 113 people have been killed across Chicago — precisely the same number as the number of U.S. troops killed in Iraq and Afghanistan combined during the same time period, the legislators noted.

"U.S. troops have been winning the hearts and minds (of people) in Iraq," Ford said. "They've stabilized those communities. They made those communities much better. Now those communities are safe. That's what we want right here in Illinois, for the National Guard to come in and stabilize these communities."

Fritchey and Ford noted the National Guard has been deployed in other states to prevent violence related to specific events and protests, but added that they were unaware of guardsmen and women being deployed to assist with general urban unrest.

They stressed a call for National Guard help here should not be equated with marshal law.

"We're not talking about rolling tanks down the street," Fritchey said. "We're not talking about armed presence on every corner. We're talking about individuals, men and woman that have been specifically trained to assist law enforcement and, assist with civil unrest. This is what the National Guard in part is trained to do."

But Weis cautioned against "comparing apples and oranges."

Referring to the Kent State shootings in 1970, when National Guardsmen fatally shot four student protesters at a campus demonstration, Weis said that “when you mix military functions with law enforcement functions, there is sometimes a disconnect.”

Noting that the military does not operate under the same constitutional constraints as the police, he questioned how Chicago residents would react to soldiers raiding homes without warrants, and said that in his 25 years of law enforcement experience, he had never seen an example of military personnel working under local civilian command.

“The National Guard is very useful if we had a big earthquake or huge flood or a catastrophe like that, where we simply had to control folks,” he said, “But the problems we’re facing are illegal weapons, narcotics and gangs. And while I will always look out for as much help as we can, I don’t think the National Guard is the solution.”

The lawmakers could better help by passing tougher gun control laws, he said, also calling on communities affected by violence to “break the code of silence” against identifying criminals.

Quinn spokesman Bob Reed declined comment.

Fritchey and Ford noted that 80 percent of city homicide victims are black. Ford represents constituents in the West side communities of Austin, Lawndale and West Garfield, that have been hard hit by homicides and other crime. Fritchey represents constituents in the lower-crime North side communities of Bucktown, DePaul, Lincoln Park, Roscoe Village and Ravenswood.

The legislators said while they believe more should be done to deal with the violence, their views shouldn’t be seen as criticism of local law enforcement, whose resources are stretched thin.

They added Weis recently pointed out most violent crime in Chicago happens on just 9 percent of the city’s blocks. To target these “hot spots,” Weis has said he was seeking 100 officers to volunteer for a summer-long “strategic response team.”

Deploying the Guard is a better option, Fritchey and Ford contend.

While Weis came out against the suggestion Sunday, he did add that he had yet to discuss it with the mayor and that is something he was willing to “explore.”

“I’d have to see what the mayor’s position on this is,” he said. “If he’s open to it, you know, of course, I’d be open to it. I have certain concerns, based on my time in law enforcement and the United States military.”