

Adams holds forum on gun violence



Residents listen intently during the Safer 12th Community Forum held at the Winston Lake Family YMCA on Thursday, July 21. The event was hosted by Rep. Alma Adams, and was designed to bring stakeholders together to discuss the increase in violent crimes.

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

Last week Congresswoman Alma Adams sat down with city officials, local faith leaders, and members of the community to discuss the recent rise in gun violence in the city and across the nation.

Adams, the Representative for District 12 which currently includes parts of Guilford and Forsyth Counties, said she felt it is important to hold an open conversation with the stakeholders in the community to discuss the issue. She mentioned the recent rise in gun violence in Winston-Salem is a reflection of what has become a problem for cities across the nation.

"The issues we are facing in Winston-Salem and Forsyth County mirror a number of the issues we are facing in communities across the country," said Adams. "Our country has failed to pass sensible gun

safety reform measures and gun violence is ripping our neighborhoods."

In just seven months, the city has already seen 15 homicides, double the amount for all of 2015. According to the Winston-Salem Police Department, there has also been an increase in aggravated assaults, which refers to incidents where a weapon was used but the victim survived, and drive by shootings.

At the national level, major cities have seen 114 more murders than last year, as well as increases in rapes and robberies. Last month, Adams was one of 130 Democratic lawmakers who participated in a sit-in on the House floor in protest of Republicans' unwillingness to vote on a bill that would expand background checks and ban gun sales to those on the "no-fly" watch list.

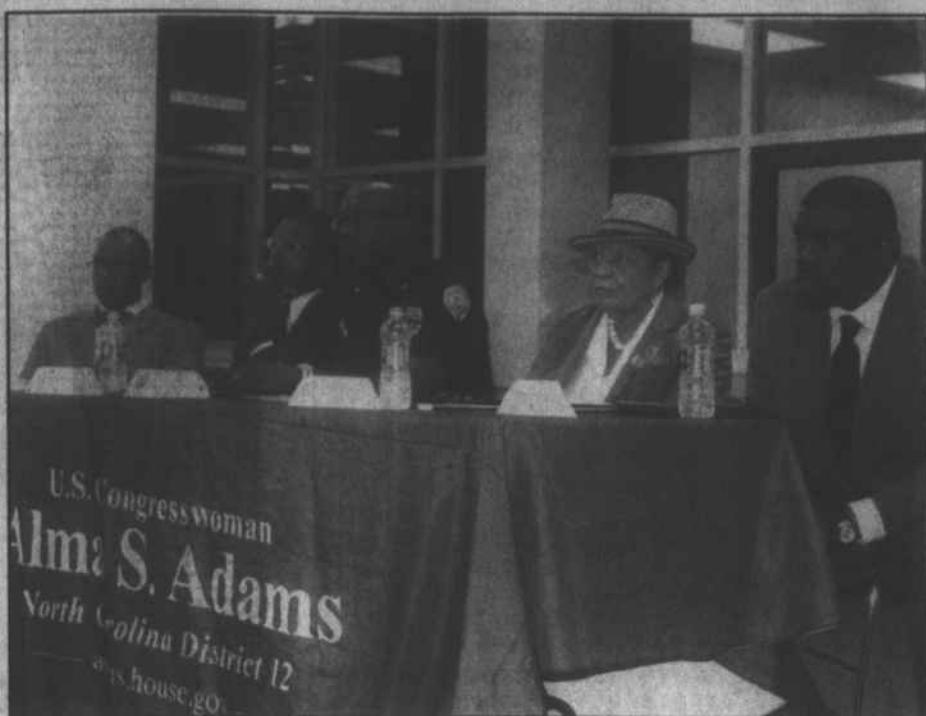
"We have to get past being silent about this issue and begin to have conversations. That's the

reason we are here today," she continued. "We are well overdue for a conversation that will bring all sides together."

During the Safer 12th Community Forum held at the Winston Lake Family YMCA, more than 100 community members listened intently as council member

Derwin Montgomery, Chief Barry Rountree, Rev. Alvin Carlisle and Brother Effrainguae Muhammad conversed about different initiatives they have helped establish to combat the recent rise in violent crimes and improve the relationship between the community and law enforcement.

Chief Barry Rountree discussed the efforts of the WSPD. He noted the construction of three police substations and the Winston-Salem Police Foundation are just some of the ways they are looking to improve the relationship between police and citizens.



Photos by Tevin Stinson

The Safer 12th Community Forum hosted by Rep. Alma Adams brought together various stakeholders in the community to discuss the recent increase in violent crimes. The panel which featured city officials, local faith leaders, and community activists was held at the Winston Lake Family YMCA on Thursday, July 21.

"Those substations are going to allow us to be more involved in the community," he said. "It is important to this department that we have a working relationship with the people we serve."

Representative for the East Ward Derwin Montgomery talked about the city's efforts. He mentioned City Council's decision to provide additional funds for S.O.A.R. (Successful Outcomes After Release), a program designed that provides job training for those recently released from prison, and the Winston-Salem Urban League's summer employment program.

Montgomery noted, "When discussing the violence that we see in Winston-Salem and other cities across America, we must also address the social economic issues that undergird the violence."

"It's very simple," he continued. "We cannot separate the social economic issues that are

aligned with the violence. The policies that the City Council works for will continue to address these issues."

Third vice president of the Ministers' Conference of Winston-Salem and Vicinity Rev. Alvin Carlisle discussed the faith community's efforts to build a better community. Carlisle said the Conferences' initiatives attack the issue by focusing on decreasing poverty and making education more accessible for those who come from low-income households.

He said, "It is the mission of the Conference to cultivate mindsets that will cause people to realize that all lives have value, and all lives are important."

Community activist Brother Effrainguae Muhammad wrapped up the panel discussion by discussing the importance of community policing. He also urged community members to do what they can to reduce crime.

"We can't expect law enforcement to fix this problem alone. We have to do our part as well."

Muhammad said local members of the Nation of Islam have established the Squash the Beef Hotline that will set up conflict resolution centers that will end senseless disagreements that lead to shooting deaths.

"This is a preventable measure we are doing," he said. "Many of those who have lost their lives have been because of ego."

Following a brief Q and A session with residents, Rep. Adams thanked the panelists for their participation and urged them to continue to fight gun violence in the community.

"This is something I am very adamant about," she said. "As you continue to fight here locally, I will continue to fight in Congress."

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