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Bringing it all back home
City Insider
San Francisco Chronicle
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It was bound to happen eventually: After eight friendly, laid-back town hall meetings in his campaign for governor, Gavin Newsom drew a tough audience Tuesday night.

A dozen or so residents from Bayview-Hunter's Point -- along with members of the Nation of Islam -- followed Newsom to downtown Oakland to confront him on development at the shipyard and claims that nearby families are being exposed to contaminents.

Newsom answered a handful of their questions, telling residents that he's garnered "hundreds of millions of dollars" in federal funding to clean up the site. He was pretty patient as he listened to their complaints, even as his efforts to turn the meeting back toward his favorite topics -- health care, education and the environment -- were repeatedly interrupted.

"It felt like I was back home," Newsom said about the meeting, which was attended by about 200 people.

He said he was a little frustrated that many Oakland residents who came to the event didn't get to ask their questions. "What happened was theatrics," he said. "You saw all the people with their hands in the air wanting to ask questions."

Still, he managed to move beyond Bayview-Hunter's Point for most of the event, fielding questions on legalizing marijuana (he's against it), education and the economy.

About halfway through the meeting a woman asked Newsom about the sanctuary city ordinance -- a controversial topic that could haunt the mayor in conservative parts of California -- and whether he'd apply San Francisco's policy to the rest of the state. Newsom said yes.

To read this on line, with reader comments, please go to: http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/blogs/cityinsider/detail?&entry_id=36848

Newsom tests water for governorship in Oakland
By Angela Woodall
Oakland Tribune
Posted: 03/10/2009 08:54:12 PM PDT

OAKLAND — San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom came to Oakland on Tuesday evening to drum up support as he tests the waters for a run in 2010 at the state's top executive position. His critics were not far behind, testing his efforts to talk about how he would handle the state's fate and future as the governor of California.

"I always want to tap into that optimism," he told the crowd of about 200 residents from both sides of the Bay, as well as elected officials, volunteers and community advocates gathered at the Rotunda Building downtown.

Arriving about 30 minutes later than the scheduled 6 p.m. start time, Newsom defended his five-year track record as mayor and laid out a general idea of what voters could expect from the young mayor who has been a lightning rod for conservative critics for his progressive stance on issues such as same-sex marriage. He also has been consistently criticized by sectors of San Francisco's progressive groups, especially about environmental issues in the former industrial shipyards of the Bayview Hunters Point area.

Tuesday was no exception.

"It's a shame we have to come to Oakland to talk to you," one man yelled.

Newsom has been on an early campaign trail for four months, holding such open forums to drum up support and hear community concerns.

Tuesday he championed universal health care, a version of which was implemented in San Francisco in 2007, called the Healthy San Francisco program for uninsured San Francisco residents.

The move, however, requiring small businesses with more than 20 employees to provide health care, has been unpopular among some owners who complain they have had to decrease their staff to avoid the requirement.

Newsom also said he would restore funding for local public transit funding that was cut by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger this month to balance the state budget. Public transit is critical to the state, Newsom said.

He promised to champion biotechnology and green technology jobs. This is the growth area for the Bay Area, he said. The next governor has to focus on supporting "green tech jobs" and "the workforce of tomorrow," he said, including a focus on job training for Latino and African-American communities.

"That's the economic development strategy we're promoting in the context of this campaign," Newsom said.

He also defended his record as mayor in protecting undocumented workers, in response to a query from a San Francisco resident who asked if Newsom would expand the city's municipal identification cards for all residents to the rest of the state if he became governor. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors approved the identification card legislation in 2007 for all residents — whether they are in the country legally or not, which was written by San Francisco Supervisor Tom Ammiano.

That Newsom is exploring a run for governor came as a surprise to Jane Goldberg, an Oakland small-business owner. Goldberg, the founder of Plant-It Water, came to hear Newsom address environmental issues. Goldberg said she would support Newsom as governor because he is "newer." Newsom, she said, is not "mired in Washington politics" as much as his potential opponents U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and state Attorney General Jerry Brown, a former Oakland mayor and governor.

Patricia Lewis arrived early to the forum to hear Newsom. Lewis said she was confident he would do a "pretty good job" as governor because of his general views and the way he seemed to speak his mind about gay rights.

Although she did not agree with his 2004 move to recognize same-sex marriage in San Francisco, Lewis said gay rights was "one of the issues that needed to be addressed."

She also has been following his efforts to tackle a $575 million shortfall facing San Francisco. Newsom recently backed off calling the budgetary chasm a crisis as he looks for ways to cut deeper into the city's $6 billion budget, which he, as the mayor, controls $1.2 billion in discretionary dollars for the city and county. San Francisco is the only city in the state for which the mayor governs the city and the county.

When Newsom took over as mayor in 2004, San Francisco faced a $300 million deficit. As governor he would inherit California's $42 billion deficit.

It is challenging to govern in these difficult economic times, Newsom said.

"But governing the cities of San Francisco and Oakland are probably the most challenging," he said, nodding to

Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums.

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