

January 1, 2010

Editorial

Mr. Bloomberg's Third Term

In the last 100 years, only three New York City mayors have served three terms. After spending more than \$100 million to become the fourth, Michael Bloomberg boasted on election night that he would challenge the conventional wisdom, and the historical record, that third-term mayors are too tired and too jaded to serve the city or themselves terribly well.

Mr. Bloomberg, who will be sworn in on Friday, has already accomplished a good deal and is always eager to prove the pundits wrong. This time, it will be harder.

The political climate is a lot less welcoming. If the mayor isn't tired, many New Yorkers are tired of him, especially after he helped overturn term limits — a misguided but popular city law. His re-election was a squeaker, for all the money and the army of advisers.

Mr. Bloomberg's biggest personal challenge will be to tame his imperious nature. The city has serious problems, starting with the economy, and he will have to deliver bad news to New Yorkers in coming months.

That means that the mayor will have to work harder than he has in the past to rally support from the City Council (many members already see him as a lame duck). And he will have to concentrate more on rallying public support. He will need to reach out, to hold more town hall meetings, to be accessible and allow New Yorkers to give their unvarnished opinions. And when they do, he needs to listen. This is not Mr. Bloomberg's strong suit, but he will have to get better at it.

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The mayor's biggest policy challenge this year will be wrestling with a \$4.1 billion deficit in his next city budget. Tax revenues are disappointing, and the state's fiscal situation is catastrophic, which means that support from Albany will only go down.

Next year's budget is due at the end of June, but Mr. Bloomberg wisely has already started cutting. He has targeted \$550 million in savings for this fiscal year and is planning to reduce spending by \$1.2 billion in the following one. New Yorkers will soon start to

feel the squeeze — with fewer new parks and playgrounds, leaner school budgets, less child care support and personnel cuts, including uniformed forces.

As a businessman, the mayor has the right skills to keep the \$60 billion budget balanced. As a billionaire, who thrives in Manhattan's social stratosphere, he has to be especially careful about how he explains the need for sacrifices by others. He should take extra care to ensure that cuts do not weigh heaviest on the needy and make certain that struggling families and city businesses both have a decent chance to survive. It will be a tough balancing act, financially and politically.

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New York City schools are better today in many crucial ways than when Mr. Bloomberg took over. The old, ineffective Board of Education shed chancellors with dizzying frequency. After the State Legislature finally scrapped the board and gave the mayor control of the schools, he brought much-needed stability. He has also swept away the bureaucratic underbrush, strengthened the teacher corps and increased teachers' salaries.

Shortly after the November election, the mayor directed the schools chancellor, Joel Klein, to start using student performance data to determine teacher tenure. It is a sound approach, as long as it is done carefully and fairly. That directive also sent an important signal to the teachers' unions that Mr. Bloomberg is now ready to demand more for their enhanced salaries. He also wants bad teachers out of the classroom and off the payroll. In all, the mayor's education policies have been a good thing for students, but he and his school officials still have to spend more time listening to concerned parents.

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Like all mayors, Mr. Bloomberg wants his share of monuments. He already has waterfront parks, two finished stadiums, a slew of high rises and tantalizing possibilities on Governors Island. Going forward, it will be hard for the public to stomach any big giveaways like Yankee Stadium, which, at the mayor's urging, got billions of dollars of support, including taxpayer-backed debt, tax breaks and the use of city parkland.

“It's a time for singles, not home runs,” said Mitchell Moss, a professor at New York University and informal adviser to the mayor. Mr. Bloomberg should use his business acumen to push for more developments with housing for moderate-income residents and public workers. The next time some bigwig wants a stadium or a fat new zoning change, the mayor should take care to demand more parks and public facilities as part of the deal. The bottom line for any development should be that it helps out more than the developer's bottom line.

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Given his history — the anti-smoking campaign, the advances against trans fats and the calorie counts in restaurants — Mayor Bloomberg can be expected to aim in the right

direction on health care. Other areas worthy of more focus are asthma, obesity and diabetes.

The environment is a tougher climb. The latest report on air quality from the city's health department is especially alarming: it showed unhealthy levels of pollution in high-population areas throughout the city. Mr. Bloomberg should revive his fight in Albany for some form of congestion pricing.

Cars are a big problem, but so are all of those buildings spewing black smoke. The Council approved an initiative that helps move toward Mr. Bloomberg's goal of cutting 30 percent of the city's carbon output by 2030. But it only requires large buildings to audit their energy use, not upgrade the equipment if they find problems. The hope is that once they see the numbers, owners will decide to invest in improvements to save both energy and money. That may work. But if the economy improves for real estate, the mayor should revive his idea of requiring owners to do what is needed to clear the air.

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We have confidence in Mr. Bloomberg. He is a smart leader with sound priorities. The next four years will test his political skills — his ability to work with a State Legislature that would try anyone's patience and Washington politicians who take more money from the city than they give back. Most of all, he will have to persuade all New Yorkers that, even in a time of sacrifices, he is truly on their side.