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# Bloomberg Has Added Jobs, and Lost Some, Too

By [CHRISTINE HAUGHNEY](#)

During much of his tenure, Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#) has taken credit for helping to create hundreds of thousands of jobs in New York City, from high-paying construction work to sales jobs at dozens of new big-box stores. Even as the city plods through the recession, the mayor has [set a goal](#) to “retain and create” an additional 400,000 jobs over the next six years.

The debate over how much influence a mayor, a governor or a president has over jobs is one that may never be settled. But if Mayor Bloomberg can be judged on the numbers he has used as evidence of his own success, those numbers, while generally accurate, also contain some warning signs about the future of employment in the city.

Even in the downturn, the city has 130,000 more jobs than it had when Mr. Bloomberg became mayor, according to state labor statistics. Working-class New Yorkers who kept their jobs or stayed in the same field saw their pay rise faster than the rate of inflation.

But the overall job market constantly shifts, particularly in a recession, when the economy sheds jobs and even whole industries. And in New York, middle- and working-class jobs that have disappeared — in fields like manufacturing, wholesale distribution and administrative services — have been replaced by jobs in sectors like retail, food service and home health care that generally pay less.

“There’s been much more growth in lower-wage industries than in middle-wage industries,” said James Parrott, chief economist for the [Fiscal Policy Institute](#), a liberal research group. “That’s a challenge for people struggling to maintain a decent livelihood in New York City, given the cost of housing and everything else.”

Several research groups have concluded that jobs created for working-class New Yorkers will continue to be in these low-wage fields. A study by a nonpartisan group, the [Center for an Urban Future](#), said that the two occupations that will have the most openings in New York City through 2014 are retail salesperson, with an average annual pay of \$20,690, and cashier, with pay of \$16,800.

“Working-class people with limited educational backgrounds and limited skills are going to be fighting for scraps at the bottom,” said Jonathan Bowles, director of the Center for an Urban Future.

By August 2008, Mayor Bloomberg oversaw a city with 3.244 million jobs, its highest number since 1969, according to Mr. Parrott. With roughly 227,000 more jobs than when the mayor took office, the city had surpassed national job growth rates, a point the mayor proudly noted in his 2009 State of the City address, when he said the city had added a quarter-million jobs before the slowdown.

But much as boom times can make elected officials look like Midases, recessions can tarnish them. From August 2008 to August 2009, the city lost 96,739 private-sector jobs. These included 35,986 finance and insurance jobs, which paid \$280,872 annually on average in 2008. They also included 10,712 construction jobs, which paid on average \$68,119.

Some trends predated the recession. The manufacturing industry, in steady decline for decades, lost 43 percent of its New York City jobs from January 2002 to August 2009. In 2008, these jobs paid on average \$52,758 a year.

According to the Center for an Urban Future, manufacturing accounts for about 3.2 percent of the job market in New York City, compared with 8 percent in San Francisco and 12.7 percent in Los Angeles. At the same time, New York City has a higher proportion of lower-paying jobs in health care and social assistance — 17.4 percent of the work force — than those cities.

“New York used to be a place that really nurtured a middle class,” Mr. Bowles said. “There’s compelling evidence that we have done worse than other cities.”

Seth W. Pinsky, president of the [New York City Economic Development Corporation](#), the city’s business-development arm, defended the city’s efforts to create more middle-income jobs and says these jobs have not yet been fully realized for the long term.

“The New York City economy is in some ways like an aircraft carrier,” Mr. Pinsky said. “You can’t change 50-year trends in five years.”

The mayor has used several programs to try to keep or add jobs, including development projects like modernizing the [Hunts Point Terminal](#) in the Bronx, which supplies wholesale food for many of the city’s groceries and restaurants. He has created an emergency loan program for small businesses and streamlined the process of obtaining business permits.

A construction boom — not only of private residential buildings, but also of public projects like schools, libraries and a new police academy — stimulated the building trades.

The mayor has also invested tens of millions of city dollars to encourage the creation of a thriving biotechnology industry, seen by many as the growth sector of the future. The city has invested in a large research space at the [Brooklyn Army Terminal](#) in Sunset Park and

is supporting the \$700 million [East River Science Park](#), a complex of office and lab space next to [New York University Medical Center](#) that is scheduled to open next year.

To try to reserve new jobs for lower-income New Yorkers, he says he will push community colleges to do a better job of turning out students with job skills.

[Mitchell L. Moss](#), a professor of urban policy and planning at [New York University](#) who has been an informal adviser to Mr. Bloomberg, credited the mayor with creating jobs by taking on projects like the science park, the Hunts Point market, the Brooklyn Navy Yard and Homeport in Staten Island.

“He took on some of the messiest and most complicated projects,” he said. “Economic development takes longer than educating a child in school. It doesn’t take eight years. It takes 15 years. The great successes of Bloomberg are getting things done that previous mayors were afraid to deal with.”

But at the moment, opportunities are concentrated in lower-wage fields. Dale Grant, whose firm, Grant Associates, runs one of the city’s work-force training centers in Queens, said that her company used to be able to place people in entry-level jobs like bank teller, paying \$10 to \$12 an hour but eventually leading to bank careers paying \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year.

Those jobs have virtually disappeared, she said, replaced by lower-paying jobs in high-end stores like Gracious Home and Banana Republic, where entry-level positions often pay \$20,000 to \$25,000 a year and assistant manager jobs pay \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year.

Her firm also places people in education jobs that include teaching assistant positions in [charter schools](#) that pay \$30,000 to \$35,000 a year and tutoring jobs that would pay \$30,000 to \$40,000 if they were full time, but ordinarily they are not.

But even retail jobs can be hard to find in this economy. Carlos Peralta, 37, of Bushwick, Brooklyn, worked in a warehouse from 2004 to 2009, earning \$22,000 a year cutting phone company cable. Since he lost his job three months ago, he has been applying for jobs at retailers like [BJ’s Wholesale Club](#). So far he has had no interviews.

“I’m on the computer all night” looking for a job, he said.

He is also considering going to college, and has been researching scholarships he learned about from the unemployment office.

For New Yorkers who held onto their jobs, the last few years brought larger paychecks, at least through 2008, according to the [Census Bureau](#)’s most recent income estimates. Adjusted for inflation, median income in New York City rose 8 percent, to \$51,116, between 2002 and 2008, according to the bureau.

Frank Zucco, 46, a painter from Dyker Heights, Brooklyn, watched his pay rise to about \$65,000 in 2008, from about \$45,000 in 2002. This year he is on track to earn \$80,000, including about \$20,000 in overtime because of demand for workers on public sector projects, like school construction. Mr. Zucco, who is also the financial secretary for his union local, said that he has found his fellow painters have been doing just as well.

“There’s no more money in the private sector. Most of the work moved over to city work and public work,” he said. “As far as New York is concerned, Mayor Bloomberg has been doing pretty good in terms of creating jobs for us.”

Many experts are hesitant to give too much credit, or blame, to mayors for job creation or losses. Steve Malanga, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, a conservative group, said that cities are their own economic engines and that politicians have little impact. “Most municipal economic development strategies matter only on the margins,” he wrote in an e-mail message.

Some advocates for low-wage workers would like Mr. Bloomberg to exert one power that he, along with the City Council, does have: to create a city minimum wage that exceeds the federal minimum, currently \$7.25 an hour. Cities that have done so, like San Francisco (\$9.79) and Santa Fe (\$9.85), have not suffered, according to Paul Sonn, legal co-director of the National Employment Law Project.

Andrew Brent, a Bloomberg spokesman, said that the mayor favored a higher minimum wage everywhere, not just in New York; Mr. Pinsky, of the city’s economic development corporation, said that the minimum wage was a matter for the State Legislature to address.

For now, minimum wage is the best that some workers can hope for. In her eight years in New York, Adela Valdez has watched her wages ebb from a \$19,200-a-year job washing laundry in Manhattan and a \$21,000-a-year factory job making lampshades to her current job, working as a home care aide in Queens for \$14,400 a year. Julissa Bisono, an organizer with Make the Road New York, which gives legal assistance to low-wage workers, said Ms. Valdez is stuck.

“She hasn’t found any job that pays better than what she is making now,” said Ms. Bisono.