

NYC's good mood mayor

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January 18, 2007

Upbeat about the city's economy, Mayor Michael Bloomberg laid out an ambitious agenda for next year that includes cutting property taxes while beefing up services and tightening the city's schoolteacher tenure process.

"How can you not feel that New York's future is bright with promise and that the state of our city is alive with hope?" Bloomberg said proudly yesterday during his State of the City address at New York City College of Technology in Brooklyn.

The Republican mayor, in his second and final term, also pushed for changes beyond the city - such as abolishing a state board that approves development projects and strengthening federal gun control laws.

During the one-hour speech, Bloomberg said that the city would make long-term investments in "reforming our schools, growing our economy for all New Yorkers, making the safest big city even safer, and improving the efficiency of our government."

Thanks to a local economy he said was "firing on all cylinders," Bloomberg said the city could afford a \$1 billion tax cut package that includes a 5 percent across-the-board property tax cut. It also includes extending a \$400 property tax rebate and eliminating the city's sales tax on clothing and footwear.

The mayor also outlined a slew of new or expanded programs intended to help the poor, troubled youth and child abuse victims. For instance, he said he wanted to increase the number of low-income families served by a program that sends public-health nurses to visit regularly with young, low-income mothers.

The leader of the City Council, which must approve the city's property tax cut, said she supported the effort. "When property taxes were increased after the events of September 11, [2001], we promised that in good times, we would give New Yorkers relief," Speaker Christine Quinn said in a statement.

The mayor's speech got a rave review from Mitchell Moss, a professor of urban policy and planning at New York University's Wagner School. Moss, who has offered policy advice to the Bloomberg administration, applauded the property and business tax cuts. "This is going to make every New Yorker feel better about the city," he said.

Bloomberg proposed additional changes to the educational system, such as giving principals more power, determining funding per student rather than per school and making it harder for teachers to get tenure.

The mayor said the city was "building a more rigorous review process" to ensure "ineffective teachers are not awarded the privilege of tenure and the near-lifetime job security that comes with it."

In response, the head of the United Federation of Teachers, Randi Weingarten, defended the tenure system and called for the city to focus on reducing class size.

While voicing support for some of Gov. Eliot Spitzer's agenda, Bloomberg also presented his state wish list for the city. He called for getting rid of the Public Authorities Control Board, which recently killed a proposal for a Jets stadium on Manhattan's West Side that he had supported.

"Government by three men in a room has turned New York State into a national symbol of governmental dysfunction," he said to cheers. "Enough is enough."

He proposed abolishing the state Board of Elections office, which he called a patronage pit of "inertia and inefficiency." Bloomberg said the state should rein in pension costs.

MAYOR'S WISH LIST

TAXES

Lower the overall property tax rate by 5 percent, resulting in a \$750 million savings to property owners.

Eliminate the city sales tax for all clothing and footwear, saving New Yorkers \$110 million.

Send pre-completed tax forms to nearly 125,000 households that are eligible for State and Federal Earned Income Tax Credits for 2003 and 2004, resulting in \$170 million for low income New Yorkers.

SCHOOLS

The city will work with the teachers union to change tenure rules.

Schools will be graded by an independent panel and reports with letter grades on school performance will be sent to every public school parent in the city.

NEIGHBORHOODS

A master plan for the South Bronx and Willets Point is scheduled to be unveiled later this year.

Jamaica, Coney Island and the 125th Street corridor in Harlem will be rezoned to foster new business development.

CITY AGENCIES AND SERVICES

Propose amending state law to give the Administration for Children's Services the power to check criminal records when child abuse allegations arise.

Expand the Nurse Family Partnership program, which helps young mothers with parenting and life skills, by more than 50 percent.

POLICE AND

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

This year, 911 and call centers will be equipped to receive digital images and videos from New Yorkers who are at the scene of an emergency, and 311 call centers will eventually be similarly equipped to allow the documentation of non-emergency quality of life concerns.

The city will identify a new site to build a 21st century police academy and improve training.

GOVERNMENT

The city will propose replacing the State Board of Elections with the types of professional, nonpartisan agencies and commissions that other cities and nations already have to oversee their elections.

The city will work to abolish the Public Authorities Control Board.

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