

## Bloomberg struts credentials at urban convention

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ST. LOUIS -- New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, looking every bit a presidential candidate despite his repeated denials, strode onto Democratic turf Wednesday when he told attendees at the Urban League's national convention that America is failing its minority school children.

Bloomberg held himself out as a can-do executive, saying his 2002 takeover of the city's 1.2-million-pupil school system consolidated responsibility into a single set of his highly visible hands: his.

That has led to reduced school construction costs, greater teacher accountability and improvements in graduation rates and test scores in a system composed mostly of non-white children, he said.

"If we want to truly improve the education our children receive and fulfill the promise of the civil rights movement, we have to stand up and tell them 'no more,'" Bloomberg said. "No more pandering to the special interests, no more fear of tough issues and no more excuses for failure."

His comments came before a civil rights group whose inside-the-system style has stressed job opportunity and social service since it was formed in 1911.

Urban League president Marc Morial said he welcomed Bloomberg's willingness to use his big-city mayorship to spotlight urban issues.

"I'm just happy he has decided to take a national posture on important issues," said Morial, a former New Orleans mayor, who declined to speculate on a possible Bloomberg presidential bid.

Bloomberg's visit to the Urban League convention just two days before Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton and several other presidential hopefuls are to participate in a candidates' forum was the latest stop in an increasingly busy travel schedule that has had Bloomberg address campaign issues on a national and even international stage.

He has made nine trips so far this year, venturing as far away as Los Angeles, Cincinnati and Sderot, Israel. He made at least 19 official trips last year.

Bloomberg aides have been tepid in discouraging speculation -- ablaze since he dropped his GOP affiliation in April -- that he is contemplating an independent White House bid.

But he shook off reporters who asked whether he might make a late entry into the race.

"I'm going to serve as mayor for the next 890 days," he said.

Nonetheless, Mitchell Moss, a New York University professor who follows Bloomberg closely, said the mayor's willingness to use his travels to spotlight issues has given him added credibility as a potential national candidate.

He said Bloomberg's popularity in New York City's minority neighborhoods indicates that the one-time Republican successor to former mayor Rudy Giuliani could appeal to a key Democratic constituency.

"It is an important statement from the Urban League that they are interested in what he has to say," Moss said. "They are treating him equally with the majors."