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Rudy: Let It Snow, Let It Snow, Let It Snow

Contrary to the calculations of municipal accountants, the winter weather has been good for our city, our new mayor, and our much-abused sanitation workers. The snow demonstrated that New York City is far more resilient than the bland, auto-powered suburbs that surround us. A few feet of snow forced the repeated closings of suburban schools, and the shutdown of shopping malls, movie theaters and office parks. Even Interstate 78, the speedway to New Jersey's horse country and the region's premier artery, was blocked. And the hearty souls who risked cardiac arrest by shoveling their driveways discovered that most businesses in the hinterlands were closed, since neither workers nor customers could get beyond their cul-de-sacs.

But while the suburbs suffered congestive heart failure, New York City just kept right on pumping, proving that our infrastructure, though aging, is still a vital asset. For example, on Friday, February 11, more than 90 percent of the morning rush-hour subway trains completed their routes, albeit with some minor delays. On the same day, the Long Island Rail Road was paralyzed and the Merrit Parkway pattered with spin-outs. The subways, in fact, were jammed, since New Yorkers know that weather is not an acceptable excuse to miss work in a city with hundreds of miles of underground mass transit. While the Manhattan offices of Charles Schwab, the discount stockbroker, were open on February 11, none of its suburban offices was open, and even the downtown Philadelphia office was closed due to weather.

Forty-two inches of snow have fallen this winter already, and we still have the month of March ahead of us. During this era of "global warming," New York City usually gets 28 inches of snow over the entire winter. The city's crackerjack bookkeepers estimate that the harsh weather will cost the city almost \$40 million - in overtime, extra salt, and temporary workers hired to clear the snow. New York City workers may not be adept at removing asbestos from the schools, but they sure know how to clear the streets. Snow presents a very special challenge to a mayor, since a politician can get blamed if the snow-removal effort is too slow or geographically incorrect. But Rudy Giuliani has clearly benefited. The weather provided him the opportunity to become acquainted with Emily Lloyd, the city's Commissioner of Sanitation and one of David Dinkins' most talented appointees, whom Giuliani has wisely retained. Lloyd, a Brooklyn resident with a telegenic personality, might be a running mate with the mayor in 1997.

The snow also provided a chance for the mayor to learn that the city's snow plows are just garbage trucks with big shovels attached, and to discover that municipal workers actually perform at very high levels when adequately managed and rewarded.

The mayor used the weather to keep the press corps busy following him around the five boroughs as he checked on snow-removal efforts. A mayor in motion means that the press is not listening to City Hall leakers or to other politicians looking for ink. So the snow kept Rudy's competitors off the front page and reinforced the mayor's image as a guy who is running, not presiding over, the city.

Finally, the weather has been a fabulous deterrent to the "protest industry," based around the steps of City Hall. As every college administrator knows, no one marches in freezing weather; that's why panty raids and building takeovers arrive just after the hyacinths. Demonstrators unhappy over proposed budget cutbacks, police behavior or hospital closings have 'been almost invisible in this season, buried deeper than a Subaru in Syosset. Even Al Sharpton knows enough to stay indoors in subfreezing temperatures. Perhaps Rudy should pray for more, not less, snow.

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