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Can Pataki Develop Carey's Eye for Talent?

Hugh Carey is hot. After more than a decade off the public's radar screen, Carey a seven-term Congressman from Brooklyn and two-term governor has been rediscovered.

In Albany last week, Carey endorsed Pataki's budget, despite its Republican pedigree. Tomorrow, at Chemical Bank headquarters, a conference on "The Carey Years, 1975-1982" will highlight how he saved New York City from the 1970s fiscal crisis, as well as how he revitalized the region's mass transit system, reorganized the state courts, and closed the inhumane institutions for the mentally retarded, including Willowbrook on Staten Island.

George Pataki facing fiscal problems similar to those that confronted Carey has tried to emulate his Democratic predecessor. He has yet to discover, however, the key to Carey's successful tenure: a remarkable capacity to attract smart people and a willingness to delegate enormous responsibility to them. Carey understood that the best leaders are orchestra conductors, not virtuosos; he surrounded himself with independent experts and seasoned professionals, something that our new governor must learn to do.

Unlike Pataki, who has appointed cronies and campaign contributors to state jobs, Carey sought the best and the brightest from the business world, academia, journalism and government. Carey virtually invented Felix Rohatyn, a respected Wall Street financier but an unknown public commodity until Carey appointed him to the board of the Municipal Assistance Corporation. And Carey put together the coalition of business leaders (Dick Shinn of Metropolitan Life, William Ellinghaus of New York Telephone and Citicorp's Walter Wriston) and union officials (Jack Bigel, Barry Feinstein and Victor Gotbaum) that made it possible to save New York City from bankruptcy.

Carey, like Nelson Rockefeller, knew how to free scholars from the ivory tower. He pulled Cornell University economist Alfred Kahn out of the classroom into the chairmanship of the Public Service Commission and named New York University's Dick Netzer and Hunter College's Donna Shalala to the board of MAC. And Carey discovered Dr. David Axelrod, an epidemiologist at the state's Public Health Research Labs, and made him Commissioner of Health. As commissioner, Axelrod helped prove that industrial contamination at Love Canal had caused illnesses and physical deformities within families that had unknowingly purchased polluted property.

Carey, like the Brooklyn Dodgers' Branch Rickey, was a fabulous judge of talent. His appointees are now running the nation's leading corporations and foundations. Bob Morgado, secretary to the governor, now runs the Warner Music Group, and Peter Barton, a former staffer, heads Liberty Media. Peter Goldmark, Carey's first budget director, now presides over the Rockefeller Foundation,

and Barbara Blum, Carey's Commissioner of Social Services, is president of the Foundation for Child Development. Former speechwriter Rick Hertzberg is now a top editor at The New Yorker while Carey's first chief of staff, David Burke, served as president of CBS News before joining Dreyfus & Co., an investment House.

And does anyone realize how many public officials cut their teeth under Carey? Ben Ward was state Commissioner of Corrections before Ed Koch asked him to be New York City's first African-American police commissioner. Mario Cuomo's career got a kick-start when he was tapped by his fellow St. John's Law School alumnus for Secretary of State. Bob Tierney, an assistant counsel under Carey, was later named by Ed Koch as counsel to the mayor. And the new co-chair of the state Democratic Party, Judith Hope, started out as head of Carey's appointments office.

With Albany at a standstill, it's useful to remember how Carey worked with Warren Anderson, the majority leader of the State Senate. Carey and Andersen fought hard, but never in the gutter. George Pataki, still in his rookie year, can learn a thing or two from an old pro like Carey.

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