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Mayor Wants Worker Health Premiums And Cut to Welfare Funds

By RICHARD STEIER

The Bloomberg administration is seeking sweeping changes in healthbenefit coverage for city workers that would include the imposition of premiums for all basic plans, co-payments and deductibles for the giant HIP-HMO plan, and discontinuation of the city's \$35-million annual contribution to the Health Insurance Stabilization Fund.

Also on the list of 14 demands presented to the Municipal Labor Committee two weeks ago are elimination of Medicare Part B reimbursement for covered dependents, a reduction in city contributions to union welfare funds—which provide benefits such as optical and dental coverage not offered under the basic health plans — and a call for ending the HIP-HMO program as the benchmark for which reimbursement rates are established for all other health plans.

MLC: We Already Gave

Uniformed Sanitationmen's Association President Harry Nespoli, speaking in his role as chairman of the Municipal Labor Committee, pointed out March 19 that nine months ago the unions agreed to several health-care economies that were expected to save the city more than \$300 million, and dismissed Mayor Bloomberg's latest proposal as "a wish list."

He acknowledged the city's financial problems, but said that any discussions in this area would not get serious until a state budget was produced that would offer a better idea of how deep the municipal deficit would be. Although the state is supposed to have a budget in place by April 1, both Governor Paterson and state legislators have said that is unlikely to happen, with May currently a more-realistic target.

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