

At DC 37 Forum, Mayoral Hopefuls Whack Bloomberg Over Contracts

By DAVID SIMS | Posted: Monday, May 20, 2013 5:00 pm

The candidates who made it to District Council 37's mayoral forum May 16 largely pledged to consider retroactive pay in contract negotiations, cut back on privatization and outsourcing and work on some of the union's priorities, like civilianization of the Police Department.

City Comptroller John C. Liu and Public Advocate Bill de Blasio were only slightly late to the forum, co-sponsored by District Council 1707 and the Civil Service Employees Association and community groups. Former City Councilman Sal Albanese and Reverend Erick Salgado also attended, and ex-Comptroller William C. Thompson Jr., whom the union endorsed for mayor in 2009, arrived near the end.

No Love Lost With Quinn

The current front-runner for the Democratic nomination, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, may have cost herself any shot at the union's endorsement by not showing up; the announcement of her no-show was met by a cacophony of boos from the crowd.

Candidates answered questions submitted by union members. The forum is the first stage of DC 37's endorsement process; the union's screening committee will officially interview and review all the candidates before making a recommendation to the executive board, with the final vote made by the delegate assembly.

The most-asked inquiry concerned DC 37's wage contract, which expired in 2010, and Mayor Bloomberg's insistence that retroactive raises were impossible for the city to afford.

"I am not opposed to the concept of retroactivity," Mr. de Blasio said. "We need to remember that this is the same union that saved the City of New York in the 1970s...we will solve this problem again. Everything will be put on the table and we will find it together."

The Audacity of Nope

He slammed Mr. Bloomberg's audacity in letting every municipal contract expire while continuing to blame budget gaps on costs associated with city workers. "We should place blame where blame belongs, on 'expert manager' Michael Bloomberg," Mr. de Blasio said.

"The concept of retroactivity was Mayor Bloomberg's idea," Mr. Liu said, arguing that he had always settled contracts with retroactive pay in his first two terms to motivate municipal employees to keep working under expired deals.

One way to find more money in the city coffers would be to cut back on private contracts and raise taxes on the highest earners, he said. "Consultants get annual increases; meanwhile our employees get nothing," he said. "We need to fix income-tax policy so everyone pays their fair share."

Mr. Albanese said he enjoyed a strong relationship with most of the city's unions stretching back to his time as a Councilman in the 1980s and 90s. "I'm committed to provide a contract with retroactive pay," he said. "There's a surplus right now that the city has...we can find a way to pay a decent wage."

Criticize Consultant Deals

DC 37's other major bugbear, the city's growing contracting budget, was another topic of discussion. Mr. de Blasio and Mr. Liu credited the union's white papers for drawing attention to the issue, saying it could save the city money in the future and pointing to the chicanery of the CityTime scandal, in which the city was defrauded out of \$600 million before recouping it through a Federal prosecution.

"The administration has been practicing union-busting with a velvet glove in the form of privatizing and contracting-out," Mr. de Blasio said. "This is not a status quo we can live with anymore."

Insourcing more jobs to city workers "would put more money in our neighborhoods, and we'll do the job better," he said.

He also made sure to drop in a reference to his fight against Mayor Bloomberg's bid for a third term, even though the candidate who supported the extension of term limits, Ms. Quinn, was not there to respond.

'Worse With Each Year'

"Things have gotten worse with every passing Bloomberg year," he said. "There was not supposed to be a third term...some people who chose not to be here tonight helped him."

Mr. de Blasio and Mr. Liu received the most support from the crowd, with the Comptroller getting a huge cheer as he arrived late. He enjoys a warm relationship with DC 37 despite the recent conviction of a fundraiser and a campaign treasurer for campaign finance fraud.

Mr. Liu remained unbowed by the FBI investigation, saying, "They can throw everything and the kitchen sink at me, and I'll be ready for the stove!"