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Mayor Warns Unions: Pay for Health Care Or Layoffs Will Come Even With Stimulus Aid, Insists on Workers 'Sharing' Pain

By ARI PAUL



MAYOR BLOOMBERG: Keeping pressure on unions.

Service Merit Council President Neal Tepel believed that the Municipal Labor Committee, which negotiates city employee health benefits with the city, would continue to balk at the Mayor's proposal for health-care contributions.

"My understanding is that he didn't present this to the unions," Mr. Tepel said. "[Unions] will talk to the Mayor, there'll be negotiations, but I don't think there'll be give backs. I think they got burned under [former Mayor Rudy] Giuliani with givebacks, and that continues to be something that the unions are very, very concerned about, because when you give givebacks, it's forever, so they're going to be very cautious about going backwards."

In her State of the City Address Feb. 12, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn said that while homeowners would pay more in property taxes and that she would seek to create more city tax brackets for people earning more than \$90,000, that "we'll also need the city's labor unions to play their part."

Speaker Quinn pointed to the fact that the city has already instituted some of the Council's proposed budget cuts.

Reducing Consultants' Use

"For example, instead of paying \$20 million to consultants to estimate city construction costs, we'll have the agency staff—those originally hired to do the estimates—do their jobs," she said. "Also at our urging, the Police Department will stretch out replacement of their vehicles for another year. Police cars may be a little older and a little more beat up, but we can make do—and we should expand this idea to other agencies as well."

In addition, the Speaker looked to merge city functions in order to save costs.

"We've got a Department of Citywide Administrative Services, and two separate departments for city records and payrolls? Let's merge them all into one," she said. "And right now, we have a dedicated pension system for just a small number of nonclassroom Department of Education employees. We should fold that pension system into the larger pension system that covers other civilian employees. It'll save tens of millions of dollars, without touching pension benefits."

Mayor Bloomberg went to Washington Feb. 11 to urge Federal lawmakers to provide more stimulus aid for the city's ailing budget, but while there redoubled his efforts to pressure the unions to require city workers to contribute to 10 percent of their health benefits.

Even as enough aid was secured from the final bill to avert Teacher layoffs and a canceled police class, the Mayor waved a club at the unions on this issue: No givebacks means layoffs.

'We've All Got to Share'

"The taxpayers don't have the benefits that our municipal workforce has, and we've all got to share," the Mayor said in making his case for the health-care co-pays.

City workers currently do not contribute to their basic health-benefit plans, although many pay for augmented coverage. Civil

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