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News of the week

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Mayoral Deputy Comes Out Shootin' At Rules He Says Hinder City

Faults Personnel Process, Albany As Obstacles To Innovation, Savings
 By MARK TOOR



STEPHEN GOLDSMITH: Not big on current rules.

He just started the job full-time last month, but Deputy Mayor Stephen Goldsmith is already making waves.

On July 19, he joined Mayor Bloomberg and City Council Speaker Christine Quinn in announcing a plan to consolidate the city's administrative operations and save \$500 million over four years. The effort—which is expected to knock 3,000 jobs off the city payroll—will be overseen by Mr. Goldsmith.

Albany Too Powerful?

The following morning, at a breakfast sponsored by Crain's New York Business, he said the civil-service system and other anti-corruption rules implemented decades ago to curb political favoritism make it difficult to get anything done. And, he said, Albany has too much control over the city's affairs.

At the July 19 announcement, Mayor Bloomberg said that the only way to preserve services such as police, education, sanitation and parks in a time of declining revenues is to "reduce the size and cost of government. This the first stage of an effort to create a smaller, smarter, and fiscally sustainable city government."

"By taking a coordinated approach, we can root out administrative inefficiencies across city government, reducing costs and delivering a better product to the taxpayers," Mr. Goldsmith said.

The consolidation plan:

- Reduce the city's office space, now 19 million square feet, by 1.2 million square feet, letting some leases expire and wiping out many of the 8,000 empty desks scattered around the city's buildings. Savings: \$36 million a year. (The Bloomberg-Goldsmith-Quinn press conference was held amid a sea of empty cubicles at 110 William St.)
- Improve and streamline revenue collection through such methods as centralizing all collections under the Department of Finance, expediting the hearing process for fines, pursuing delinquent debtors more aggressively, restructuring compensation policies for debt-collection agencies and accepting more electronic payments, saving \$25 million to \$35 million per year and increasing collections by more than \$100 million.
- Consolidate maintenance services and refueling stations for the city's 26,000 vehicles, improve management of parts inventories and look for ways to reduce the size of the fleet. Savings: \$71 million over four years.
- Standardize human-resources operations and consolidate functions that are found in many agencies in Shared Services Centers. Potential savings: more than \$100 million.
- Consolidate and modernize the city's information-technology operations and its infrastructure, and cancel unused telecommunications services. Savings: about \$100 million.



LILLIAN ROBERTS: Cut contractors for savings.



MAYOR BLOOMBERG: 'Not here to employ everybody.'

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Mr. Bloomberg said he wasn't bothered by the expected job losses. "Our job is not to employ everybody," he said. "Our job is to provide services."

DC 37: Target Consultants

District Council 37 Executive Director Lillian Roberts said in a statement that if Mr. Goldsmith really wanted to save money, he would go after high-priced consultants.

"The Mayor's new deputy has discovered an issue that DC 37 has considered of paramount importance for quite some time—waste," she said. "To date he has discovered millions wasted on office space, furniture and vehicle fleets. We believe that when he turns his attention to the massive waste of billions of taxpayers' dollars on private contractors and outside consultants doing work public employees do more efficiently and costeffectively, he will find far more substantial sources of revenue that can protect vital city services and the men and women who provide them."

At the Crain's breakfast, Mr. Goldsmith said that because of the rules that came out of the Tammany Hall era, "for a government as big as New York City's is and as complex a society as this is, this is a pretty remarkable corruption-free government."

But, he added, "The problem is that the rules themselves become the problem. Everything is a rule. There are rules upon rules. There's rules inside the rules. . . I have not had an innovative idea in any meeting that's legal." He said the rules are not likely to stop corruption but are just a drag on the system.

He gave an example: the emergency call-boxes on sidewalks are rarely used and cost \$6 million a year to maintain, but the city needs court permission to remove them.

Albany Control 'An Infection'

He complained that the city has "a remarkable lack of authority to do things without Albany's permission. It's an infection that's everywhere."

Mr. Goldsmith said his primary task was to help the city prepare for the next budget, which starts with a \$3-billion deficit plus the loss of all Federal stimulus funding. He did not rule out closing firehouses or charging fees for trash pickup. He also knocked the civil-service system, wondering whether what he described as "merit promotions"—subjective decisions sometimes based on nepotism and cronyism that civil service was designed to forestall—would be better than promotions based on tests.

Mr. Goldsmith, 64, was Mayor of Indianapolis from 1992-1999. In that post, he cut the city workforce and privatized trash pickup, swimming pools, golf courses and many bus routes (the pools and bus routes are now back under municipal control). After leaving office, he became a Professor at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. He was chief domestic policy adviser to George W. Bush's presidential campaign in 2000 and later advised President Bush on faith-based initiatives.

As Deputy Mayor, Mr. Goldsmith oversees a dozen agencies, including the Police, Fire and Transportation Departments, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Office of Labor Relations.

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