



## Ensuring a Strong and Vibrant City

An Interview with the Honorable Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor, New York



Hon. Michael R. Bloomberg

**EDITORS' NOTE** *With a B.S. in engineering from Johns Hopkins University and an M.B.A. from Harvard, Michael Bloomberg began his career at Salomon Brothers, where he quickly advanced through the ranks, becoming a Partner in 1972. When he was fired in the wake of a Salomon merger in 1981, Bloomberg used his severance pay to start his own financial-information company, Bloomberg L.P., which has since grown into a multinational media empire with 8,000 employees in more than 100 offices worldwide. Bloomberg was elected the 108th Mayor of New York in November 2001.*

### Last November, you won reelection in a landslide victory. What are you planning for your second term?

When I took office in 2002, New York was in a difficult place. We worked hard to get the city back on its feet and we've had incredible success. In my second term, we're sticking to the promises I made in 2001 and pushing forward with new initiatives. Guided by the same values and principles that brought us here four years ago, we're taking on the biggest challenges, both old and new, to ensure a strong and vibrant city for future generations of New Yorkers.

**You recently presented an updated four-year financial plan for New York, and have said that "now is the time to address the long-term**

### structural problems in New York City's budget." What needs to be done to ensure long-term growth and fiscal stability for the city?

In a city of more than eight million people, there are a lot of day-to-day concerns, and we work hard to address them all. But it's also critical to look at the big picture and plan for the future. Too often in politics, budget surpluses that should be set aside for the future are squandered. We're determined not to make that mistake. When we worked out this year's budget, we put aside \$2 billion to create a trust fund for retirees' health benefits, so that our children will not have to bear this burden entirely by themselves. We also set aside \$1.5 billion for debt reduction and pay-as-you-go capital spending. In addition, we need to work with state legislators and labor leaders to modernize and streamline our pension and health-care costs, which can produce savings that will allow us to keep funding necessary city services and to increase wages for city employees.

We're also making major investments in the city's infrastructure – more than \$40 billion over the next four years. About a quarter of the money, or \$11.1 billion, will help to continue the tremendous progress we've made in improving the city schools, by allowing us to build the schools, classrooms, and libraries that our children need. We'll also use the money for bridge maintenance, firehouses, police precincts, museums, and development projects. We're revitalizing neighborhoods across the city, from Red Hook in Brooklyn to the Hub in the Bronx. The Yankees and the Mets are building new, privately financed stadiums, helping us reinvigorate the surrounding neighborhoods, and the Atlantic Yards project will bring commerce and jobs, as well as affordable housing, to downtown Brooklyn.

We're seeing results: Unemployment is down to 5 percent, the lowest rate since 1988, and we're creating even more jobs. On April 15, we opened the Brooklyn Cruise Terminal, a state-of-the-art complex that will play a central role in New York's tourism industry. We're expanding the Javits Convention Center to help

attract the biggest and best conventions. The East River Science Park will bring 2,500 new biotech jobs to New York, and we're revitalizing waterfront areas all over the city to create both jobs and parks. We also have a \$7.5 billion plan to create 165,000 units of affordable housing for 500,000 people by the year 2013 – the largest affordable housing plan of any city or state in the nation.

### You have achieved strong results in the area of public safety. What are some of your accomplishments, and do you feel there is a good enough understanding around the world about how secure New York is?

The New York City Police Department and Police Commissioner Ray Kelly have done a spectacular job keeping New Yorkers safe. We've reduced crime by almost 18 percent over the last four years. Even though the nation experienced a 2.3 percent rise in violent crime this year, violent crime fell 1.9 percent in New York, and overall crime dropped 4.3 percent. The NYPD is on the cutting edge of law enforcement. Using strategies like Operation Impact, which saturates high-crime areas with additional uniformed officers, and technologies like the Real Time Crime Center, we've reduced crime in nearly every category and made America's safest big city even safer.

We're constantly working to keep New York safe. The NYPD has one of the most advanced counterterrorism units in the world, and the most sophisticated of any police force. We have roughly 1,000 police officers assigned to counterterrorism and intelligence, and we have agents all over the globe. The police coordinate their efforts with the Fire Department, the Office of Emergency Management, the Department of Health, and several other agencies, ensuring that New Yorkers are always protected. It's an expensive effort, but we're going to make sure we do everything that's necessary to keep New York safe.

People all over the country and the world understand that New York is a safe and exciting place to visit. In 2005, the city welcomed 42 million visitors. We expect

that number to rise to 43 million in 2006, and we're working to make it 50 million by 2015. The city's tourism industry today generates more than \$22 billion in spending and \$13 billion in wages, supporting over 300,000 jobs in travel and tourism.

**Illegal guns and gun crime have been a major focus for the administration. You have said that this is "a national problem that needs a national approach." How are you working with other Mayors around the country to develop a strong coalition to address this problem?**

New York is leading a national effort to take illegal guns off the street. On April 25, Boston Mayor Thomas Menino and I hosted the first-ever National Summit on Illegal Guns in New York, where a coalition of 15 Mayors convened to discuss innovative law-enforcement strategies and ways to coordinate local, state, and federal efforts to stem the flow of illegal guns. This not a partisan issue – Mayors from both major parties have joined our coalition. So far, more than 80 Mayors have joined our coalition, pledging to continue the fight against illegal guns in our own cities and states and on Capitol Hill.

Working with the City Council, we recently passed four bills that will help us keep guns out of the hands of criminals. And recently, we have filed a federal lawsuit against 15 gun dealers in five states whom we caught on hidden cameras breaking federal law by selling guns illegally. I'm pleased to say that two of those dealers have agreed to a court-appointed monitor who will be authorized to monitor their books and sales practices – and impose financial penalties for any further violations.

**Education has been a key focus and priority for your administration. Are you happy with the progress you have made in addressing education challenges? What do you hope to accomplish in this area in your second term?**

Four years ago, I asked New Yorkers to give me control of the school system and to hold me accountable for the results. We wanted to streamline the system, to make it run more efficiently, so the kids get the education they need and deserve. I can't stress how important it is to have great schools – the health and the future of the city depend on it. Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and the Department of Education are pushing forward with the Children First initiative, focusing on leadership, empowerment, and accountability.

We're seeing real results. Graduation rates, after remaining stagnant for 20 years, are increasing. The state has placed 290 city schools on its high-performing list, up from 186 the year before. And we're closing the intolerable achievement



*The Mayor breaking ground on Gateway Center at Bronx Terminal Market*

gap between students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds that has existed for far too long. Schools are the engines of equality in our society, and it's absolutely imperative that all students get the education they need to follow – and achieve – their dreams.

**What has your administration done to redevelop Lower Manhattan since September 11, 2001?**

The rebirth of the area since September 11 has been something no one predicted five years ago. Immediately after September 11, we developed a strategic plan to rebuild and revitalize the area with targeted investments, and we unveiled the City's Vision for Lower Manhattan in December 2002. The Vision helped guide the public sector's contributions to redevelopment – including new parks, schools, and transportation – and we combined those efforts with tremendous support from the private sector. The commercial real estate market in Lower Manhattan is growing strong, and tourism in the area is flourishing.

In May, the city, the states of New York and New Jersey, the Port Authority, and Silverstein Properties agreed on a deal that will reorganize the rebuilding of Ground Zero to be fair, affordable, and swift. Construction is already underway, and the Freedom Tower is expected to open in 2011. Thanks to a dedicated team, led by Builder Frank Sciamè, we've been able to rein in the cost of the World Trade Center memorial to \$500 million. And Ground Zero is hardly the only place where there's action – we're working on the East River Waterfront Project, building new transit stations, and redeveloping the Battery Maritime Building.

**How important has the working relationship with the private sector and business leaders been to achieving many of your objectives?**

The partnership between the public and private sector was pivotal to the city's recovery after 9/11, and continues to be essential to the city's health. When we've worked to revitalize neighborhoods or further develop industry, our relationship

with the private sector has been invaluable. One of the ways we work together is through the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City, which has raised \$72 million over the last four and a half years. The Fund has supported a wide range of innovative projects in areas including the arts, parks, education, and health. One of our newest programs provides eyeglasses for students. If you can't see what's written on the blackboard, how can you learn? With the enormous support of the private sector, we've also been able to reinvigorate other city nonprofits, such as the Fund for Public

Health in New York and the Health and Hospitals Corporation.

**When you look back at your accomplishments to date, what are you most proud of?**

I'm focused on looking forward, but I do think there's a lot to be proud of. The employees of the city have accomplished a tremendous amount in the last few years, and I can't thank them enough for their efforts. Crime and unemployment are down, the city is growing, there's development across the five boroughs, and 200,000 New Yorkers have quit smoking since we banned it in restaurants and bars about four years ago. And after years of politicians turning their backs on a failed school system, we're making real progress to ensure that all our children get a high-quality education. That's critical to our city's future, and we're determined to keep making progress.

**How would some of the people closest to you describe your management style?**

The only way to lead successfully is to surround yourself with smart people. At City Hall, I sit with all my Deputy Mayors and Advisers around me, the same way I arranged the office at Bloomberg L.P. The key is communication – with everyone close together, we can share our ideas and work more effectively.

**There is much debate about what is next for Michael Bloomberg. Do you see yourself continuing in public service, or do you want to go back to the private sector?**

Being Mayor of New York really is the best job in the world. You can make a difference in people's lives, and you can see that difference relatively quickly. You get to experience all that's great about this city – particularly our incredible diversity. I have no intention of running for any other office. There are more than three years left in my term, and I'm looking forward to every day. After I leave City Hall, I plan to concentrate on philanthropy. It has been a very gratifying and important part of my life so far, and I'm looking forward to devoting more time to it. ●