

3/13

THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2002

Ground Zero

'We Owe It to Those That We

Lost to Expand Our Quest'

Following are excerpts from an interview with Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg.

Q How did your feelings change after Sept. 11, which, of course, was supposed to be the primary? Did any part of you not want to be mayor?

A No, I never had that feeling. I think I knew it would be more complex. There is a dimension of the job that is just more difficult, in terms of dealing with a budgetary shortfall. There was an element to the job that was going to be new: that's going to funerals, working on the memorial — things that are directly related to 9/11 — working on the design for what you build there. But you know, the fundamental job isn't that different. You always had a lack of housing, you always had transportation problems, you always had people that are desperately in need of social services. And the magnitude of New York City is such that 9/11 makes some of those problems worse. ... But I still come back to the basic problems of this city aren't any different, and we owe it to those who died to fix those problems. I've tried to call 400 families of firefighters, police officers and court officers who died, and maybe I have 40 left to go ... and almost all of the families say, I want a better life for my children ...

Q Is there anything that is not getting the time and attention it would have received because it has been overshadowed by 9/11?

A I think you still would have had a problem. Lower Manhattan was losing the financial sector. We didn't have enough housing. A lot of the problems of this city are caused by the national economic slowdown. So 9/11 puts a bump on it, 9/11 moves it to other industries, particularly tourism or any that depend on flying.

In the end, 9/11 probably economically hurt the poor more than anybody else, because Wall Street was contracting and laying off anyway. But when tourism got hurt — tourism is an industry that gives jobs to those at the beginning of the economic ladder, the people that work in the hotels, the people who work in the restaurants, people that drive the buses, those people starting up the economic ladder. And they live all throughout the city and the region; they weren't living downtown.

Q How does 9/11 characterize your mayoralty? Are you the rebuilding mayor?

A ... In terms of rebuilding, an awful lot of buildings that we build here won't be done in seven years from now. Just think about the length of time it takes. We still haven't really agreed on, conceptually, what should be here. That is what I want to focus on over the couple of months. I had no objection to the six plans that the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation put out, but I thought they were all variations on one conceptual ideal. Just office space. I

would consider just residential; I'd consider mixed. ... You have to consider rebuilding the two towers. I think that's impractical. Could not happen. You could never finance the thing. Nobody would move into it. But you want to go and say, what are the needs of this city and what are the different ideas? Which of the different ideas fit the needs?

... and I think the same mistake is being made with the memorial. Everybody wants to talk about the size of the memorial and the location of the memorial. But I don't know why we are sure what the memorial will be. For example, it could be a park. I think that's what most people envision. ... There may be 10 other things that people will come up with as an idea for a memorial, a lot of which I wouldn't agree with. But this is the hard part of getting people to take the time to sit back and open their minds and consider all possibilities ...

And a lot of people don't ever want to ask questions where the possibility of the answer coming back being something they don't want to hear exists. I think you have to do that; I think we owe it to those that we want to expand our quest at a conceptual level for all different kinds of memorials and then sit back. Because it may very well be that a year from now people say, "Oh yes, of course, I would want an X, Y, Z."

Q Who are you referring to when you say "people" don't want to sit back and reflect?

A ... I think there's this pressure: we've got to build right away. But if you look at the history of great memorials, all the great ones have taken time. The perspective of being away from something lets you look at the forest. If you are in the middle of it, you can only see trees. That's true in a lot of things we do. Nobody wants to build faster than I — we need the tax revenue. I want to be the building mayor, whatever you want to call it. But I just think that it's a mistake to rush through it. ... I don't have any preconceived notion of what the memorial should be. I don't have any preconceived notions about how big it should be. I do have a preconceived notion that whatever we do on that site and around that site has to work together, and that this city has to do two things: memorialize, but also build for the future. I don't see how you could leave all 16 acres for a memorial. It's not fair to those left behind. They're going to need jobs, they're going to need schools, they're going to need restaurants and stores ...

Q What for you has been the darkest moment since Sept. 11?

A The most difficult thing was calling the three families of the employees that I had. ... I still get choked up when I do eulogies at funerals. You know they're for people I've never met. So it isn't that I'm choked up for the person. I guess I'm choked up for the concept. Because you know, I look at those left behind and that's where my sympathies are. And I've said, when I talk to the families of the firefighters and police officers that I call, you know, I can pray for your son or husband or brother or whatever, but I can't really do anything other than that. What I can do is try to lead this city forward for those left behind. And most of the families, that is what they want. You know these families' groups that you interview; they don't represent most of these families. Most of the families, you know, you talk to them — kids, the kids are screaming in the background or throwing something — and the wife, you know typically, it was a man who died, the wife says, you know, "Look, my husband's gone but he would not want me mourning all the time."

I think the Jews do it right. They have a headstone unveiling a year after the funeral, and that's sort of the time that you sort of stop the mourning process and start going forward. And that's one of the reasons I've sort of stalled on laying out a grand vision. If you will, for what New York City needs in a more comprehensive way than just the site. Because I don't think you can focus on it while we're in the middle of a grieving period. And the 9/11 ceremonies — what I'm trying to do is that in the morning, we will look back, remember who they were and why they died. And in the evening come out of it looking forward and say, O.K., we're going to go forward.

Q The world will be watching us on Sept. 11. What elements of the ceremony were most important to you?

A No political speeches. The families said that a lot, but I think independently I couldn't agree more. No Hollywood. The danger here is that it becomes a spectacular. We don't want that. The idea for the governors, Pataki and McGreevey; Giuliani; and myself — to none of the four of us to make speeches — was mine. ... I can't imagine if you read the Gettysburg Address why it isn't appropriate. And it says something, but in a nonpolitical way. The Declaration of Independence — you know everybody's flying an American flag — what's wrong with a little patriotism? These people died because the freedoms that we so value were what the terrorists found so threatening. Roosevelt's Four Freedoms in the evening — so you're going forward what could be more appropriate? And Giuliani

"We Ave..."

pg 2/3

starting to read the list of names? You know, he's not an elected official now, but he was there and he carried the city and I think it's very appropriate to have him read the names. ... I tried to pull the city together. Because people came from all five boroughs ... Reading the names and having the families walk down the ramp — this is the morning — is about the deceased. Who they were, why they died, how we're going to remember them. The evening, you light a flame, you say thank you to the whole world. You've got delegations from all the countries that are either coming to the General Assembly or who lost citizens here. And lighting a flame and talking about the future. And the music at the gatherings in all five boroughs — I wanted to use local cultural institutions at each of the five boroughs. They're all basically doing the same program, which starts out with serious, more formal music and ends up more looking forward — light, there's a new world, another world you have to go on.

My job in the end is to balance that — the memorializing with getting people to look ahead. And most people who live in New York City want that. I am sure there are some family members that say, "No, no, I lost my loved one and I don't ever want anybody to look ahead." But that's not what most people want, and that's not what I am here to do.

Q *How did you pick the three readings?*

A ... We looked at a whole bunch and then, yes, I did pick them. And I called Pataki and invited him to participate and told him what he'd be reading and I called McGreevey and told him what he'd be reading. I picked the Four Freedoms myself. And they're all short. Pataki's speech will be two minutes, two and a half. If Abraham Lincoln can do it in two and a half, he can do it in two and a half. The excerpts from the Declaration of Independence, that McGreevey is going to read. And the Four Freedoms excerpts that I am going to read are about 50 seconds, less than a minute. You have to balance the responsibilities that government officials have to be there, and participate, and show empathy and leadership, with what's appropriate. I have no second thoughts about that.

Q *Can you give me any example that shows you that the city is pulling through and looking to the future?*

A Yeah, I think this morning as much as anything. I went to an elementary school up in Harlem. Principal was out there, and the teachers and the parents and the kids. I had the chancellor, I had the new district superintendent. ... Everything was looking forward. Not one person was looking back. These are parents. They want an education for their kids that they know their kids have not been getting. And kids this age, they don't know the suffering, they don't know the pain, they don't know the loss. ... For them, the whole world is the future. ... People do believe that the best day in New York's life — and I think the best day in their lives — is tomorrow. ... Most people are optimists, particularly in New York. ...

We Owe...

PERSPECTIVES/Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg



Andrea Mohr/The New York Times

'I can pray for your son or husband or brother... but I can't really do anything other than that. What I can do is try to lead this city forward for those left behind.'