

Mike's Right on Gov's Island

A great hope for city economy

REBUILDING NEW YORK



IN Mike Bloomberg's "Blueprint for Rebuilding New York," the GOP candidate for mayor makes the following proposal for Governors Island:

"We should build a major high school and university complex on Governors Island in partnership with one or more of our great private universities," says the GOP nominee. "The room is there for athletic facilities, laboratories, workshops, classrooms, etc."

"This would also free up many existing buildings in all boroughs for junior high school, elementary school and special-education uses. Financing would be done through debt backed by sales-tax revenues after 2007 when MAC repayment obligation ends."

At long last, somebody has taken notice. Governors Island is New York City's forgotten ace-in-the-hole for the reconstruction of Lower Manhattan. The city has lost 30 million square feet of office space. Thousands of people have fled Battery Park City. Three elementary schools, one middle school and two high schools are closed indefinitely.

Although the middle and elementary schools have found reasonable temporary space, Leadership High (600 students) and the High School for Economics and Finance (730 students) are doing split sessions at overcrowded high schools uptown.

So what does Governors Island have to offer? Well, Governors Island has about



**WILLIAM
TUCKER**

800,000 square feet of potential office space sitting completely empty. Governors Island has about 800 residential units sitting completely empty.

Governors Island has an elementary school that once housed 300 pupils sitting completely empty. Building 400, exactly the same size as Stuyvesant High School, sits completely empty.

Could any of this space be used right now on a temporary basis? Better to ask, is there any reason it couldn't? The General Services Administration has kept the buildings in excellent condition. You could move in tomorrow.

Ferry service to the island could be arranged in a couple of weeks. (Ferry traffic has picked up considerably in the harbor since the World Trade Center attack and is becoming a significant complement of New York's transportation system.)

So what's the problem? Well first, the island doesn't yet belong to New York. When last consulted, Congress was asking New York to pay \$500 million for an island that the city and state donated at no cost in 1800 "for the defense of the nation."

Six months ago, New York wasn't very popular in Congress. All that has now changed.

If Sens. Schumer or Clinton or Mayor Giuliani or Gov. Pataki or even President Bush would put their minds to it for 20 minutes, Congress could probably be persuaded tomorrow afternoon to give the island back to New York as a reward for our current efforts in manning the nation's defenses.

But that's just the start. The important



Hey, Washington — know where New York can get 172 acres of land, cheap?

Reuters

thing is that, with ownership finally resolved, we could start planning to integrate Governors Island into the long-term reconstruction of the Financial District.

That's why Bloomberg's idea for a university is so spectacular. The one thing New York City lacks right now is an academic center for research and technology whose innovations could feed into the new information economy.

Boston and Silicon Valley have become the two nodes of America's Information Age by implementing ideas developed at MIT and Stanford. Texas built a high-tech center in Austin from the ground up by pouring money into the University of Texas. North Carolina has created a powerful regional economy by building Research Triangle Park.

Governors Island is the ideal location for such a university and research center.

plex in New York City. It is right at the heart of the Financial District — yet slightly apart. That quarter-mile of harbor water would serve as a buffer from the hurly-burly of the city, giving it a quiet, academic atmosphere.

All this could be easily integrated with a tourist route and waterfront commercial district built between Fort Jay and Castle William, the island's two National Historic Landmarks. The southern half of the island — which is not historically landmarked — could be used for parks and recreation.

Mark Green, who purports to fancy high technology, ought to find this idea interesting as well. But somebody should get to work on it.

New York needs a new vision of hope in the midst of our decimated economy. Governors Island offers that vision.

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