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City needs Rudy to stay a bit longer

By CLAIRE SHULMAN

As he repeated at his press conference yesterday, Mayor Giuliani is available to stay in office for three months beyond Dec. 31 to ease the transition for his successor. Yet there are those who oppose this sensible idea. Politics frequently gets in the way of good and efficient government.

The mayor could leave at the end of his term with his popularity at an all-time high. So why is he making this unprecedented offer? It can be only because he loves the city and wants to help restore its grandeur.

For the next several months, being mayor of this city will be, at best, a very difficult job, one that most people would avoid. As Giuliani said yesterday, "Anybody who thinks they are ready for this job on Jan. 1, given the monumental task, doesn't understand this job."

How shortsighted can people in positions of authority be when they insist on a brand-new administration under these dire circumstances?

I have been in government a long time, and I know what it takes to put a shovel in the ground. In our complex city, where legitimate interests constantly compete, it will take someone with an intimate knowledge of the details of government to accomplish a quick restoration of New York City — to remake it into the economic engine that fuels the nation's economy.

If Giuliani is willing to help the next administration at great cost to himself, how can we turn him down?

Keeping his team, which is complemented by many agencies at Ground Zero, will ensure that the people who have been intimately involved in running rescue operations, maintaining morale, raising New Yorkers' spirits and reclaiming New York City will stay on duty.

Just consider the families of our heroes, who need assistance quickly — without the resistance of a bureaucracy that slows down everything it touches.

Just consider the unemployment factor in many hard-hit industries and all the people with mortgages, bills and everyday expenses who depend on the city's return to a modicum of normal life.

How can we afford a learning curve in the city's leader?

Another issue is the working relationship that the mayor has established with the President and the governor, who have pledged significant help.

We need to spend that money effectively, in the city's best interests. That means putting it where it is needed most and not allowing it to disappear between the cracks. Doing that well requires the experience that our mayor has.

Political rhetoric and policy decisions without the concomitant experience in the details of governing just don't cut it.

Thomas Paine, writing about another great challenge, the American Revolution, said: "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the services of their country."

Rudy Giuliani has never been a summer soldier or sunshine patriot. He wants to stay on the battlefield a little bit longer to help the city he loves.

Let's let him do it.

Shulman, a Democrat, is the borough president of Queens.

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