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Bloomy says he's best in the world

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With the mayor's race shaping up as a fierce battle over qualifications rather than issues, Michael Bloomberg decided yesterday to boost his résumé a notch by boasting he has more government experience than anyone worldwide.

"We deal with 100 national governments. We deal with 50 state governments," said Bloomberg, the billionaire founder of a financial communications company.

"I have more experience in dealing with governments than probably anybody in the whole world."

Democratic rival Mark Green, the city's public advocate, responded tersely: "He's funny."

Joe DePlasco, Green's spokesman, added: "I think [Bloomberg] is probably referring to the municipality of Aspen [Colo.] where, apparently, he spends most of his free time skiing."

Bloomberg later conceded that he may have overstated his qualifications, calling his earlier remark a "euphemism." Asked if he had more government experience than former President Bill Clinton, Bloomberg bristled: "Come on! No. Of course Bill Clinton has more experience."

In another vitriolic exchange, Bloomberg lambasted Green for prematurely outlining his transition plans.

"I think it is arrogant to say that you don't want to talk about anything other than your transition planning," Bloomberg said. "He should talk about why people should vote for him and not go and measure the drapes for Gracie Mansion."

Green replied: "It's probably more arrogant for him to think he can buy the election."

In the midst of this war of words, Bloomberg won the endorsement of former Police Commissioner Ray Kelly.

Bloomberg said he and Kelly hope to persuade Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik to continue serving after Mayor Giuliani leaves office. Kerik has said he plans to leave with Giuliani.

Meanwhile, Bloomberg strategist Bill Cunningham tried to keep the heat on Green for failing to investigate the origins of racially divisive phone calls and posters during Green's nasty runoff battle with Democratic rival Fernando Ferrer.

"O.J. Simpson even said he would try to find out who killed his wife," Cunningham said. "Mark didn't even say he would try and find out who put the posters up."

DePlasco called the comment "the stupidest thing I've ever heard."

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This self-evident proposition is actually key. So much of the area's transportation infrastructure was destroyed that the businesses still functioning near the Trade Center site will leave the district unless the city and state move swiftly to fix the affected subway and PATH lines.

Like Green, Bloomberg wants federal money for the reconstruction, and he envisions an ambitious expansion of the subway system and more express buses to deal with the immediate problem.

Unlike Green, however, Bloomberg says the Second Ave. subway line is a nonstarter. "It wasn't funded before Sept. 11," he says, "and there's less money available now."

Assuming the transportation issue is addressed promptly, Bloomberg, unlike Green, sees businesses other than the financial services sector locating there. It's not that he wants to spread that industry around the rest of the city, as Freddy Ferrer proposed, but Bloomberg knows his history.

As it happened, the legal, insurance and financial sectors set up shop downtown despite the initial notion that trade-related business would fill the area. Bloomberg says it's similarly impossible to know which businesses will be drawn to lower Manhattan once it's rebuilt, a process that could take at least five years.

Green and Bloomberg also differ on who should oversee the rebuilding. Mark wants a new, joint state-city agency. Mike rightly realizes that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and the Port Authority have the smarts and legal standing to do the job — as long as the mayor and governor are on the same page.

Some of Bloomberg's ideas are pipe dreams. Turning Governors Island into a mecca for high schools, for instance, just isn't going to happen.

And Bloomberg can't seem to decide where he stands on using tax incentives to keep businesses in town. His written plan advocates their use, but when he unveiled his program Wednesday, he opposed the idea.

Despite the deficiencies in Bloomberg's plan, Green's response to it has been disappointing. Rather than engage the issues on the merits, Green retreated to sound bites in slamming his Republican rival:

"I don't think [Bloomberg] knows the city, and I don't think he understands government," Green said.

Serious talk needed

To which Bloomberg responded in kind: "I am happy to match my economic development credentials against a career gadfly with no economic record."

That nonsense — from both men — gets us nowhere.

Nothing is more important than understanding how Green and Bloomberg will go about fixing the city — and how they'll pay for it. Both men have put out enough concrete proposals to have a substantive debate. The constructive heat that discussion could generate is exactly what we urgently need.

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