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KELLY MAY GET A 2nd SHOT AT NYPD REINS

By MURRAY WEISS, PHILIP MESSING and MAGGIE HABERMAN

Ray Kelly, the perceived front-runner for the top-cop slot in Mike Bloomberg's administration, may be offered his old job back while he's standing at a crossroads.

On one hand, Kelly, who was police commissioner under Mayor David Dinkins in 1992-93, loves the public sector, sources close to him say.

But on the other hand, after he spent six years as a law-enforcement journeyman in the Clinton administration, Kelly recently landed a lucrative private-sector job as head of security for Bear Sterns.

Kelly was running the NYPD when the World Trade Center was hit by a terrorist truck bombing in February 1993 and was at the helm when the city's extremely high crime rates started to fall.

He helped develop Dinkins' Safe Streets, Safe City program, which dramatically increased the number of cops.

But the hallmark of Kelly's time as commissioner has been community policing — which Mayor Giuliani blasted almost as soon as he took office, but which Bloomberg has advocated in some form.

If Bloomberg — who during the election campaign was advised by longtime friend Kelly on his crime plan — wants to lure the former commissioner back, he'll face two major issues.

One is finding a way for Kelly to leave his current job without offending his Bear Sterns employers.

The other is whether Kelly — who traveled nonstop while President Bill Clinton was in power, helping establish the U.N. police force in Haiti and later serving as head of the U.S. Customs Service — is ready once again to give up time with his family.

At the same time, several people close to Kelly, who also recently agreed to take the post of state athletic commissioner, say he believes he has unfinished business at the NYPD.

A senior-level police official said that, while it's not clear whether Kelly has discussed the job with Bloomberg, "I think it's his if he wants it — and I think he wants it."

The police official noted that some may view the top-cop job as a step down for Kelly.

But the source said the fact that Kelly never enjoyed the heyday of the drop in crime — as did former commissioners Bill Bratton and Howard Safir, and current commissioner Bernard Kerik — may play a role in his thinking.

Kelly had pushed Bloomberg to lobby Kerik, who Friday said he's leaving with Giuliani, to stay on.

But some sources familiar with the effort said the chances of Kerik remaining in a Bloomberg administration, even for a short time, were always considered marginal — and that it was part of a large hope of bringing in Kelly.

With Kerik turning down the job, Kelly would have an easier time explaining to his Bear Sterns bosses and his family that the city really needs him, the sources said.



RAY KELLY
Longtime Bloomy pal.

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