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COMEBACK KELLY

Former commish set to lead NYPD again

By LARRY CELONA, ROOSEVELT JOSEPH and CATHY BURKE

The man who won praise for his handling of the police response to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing will return as the city's top cop under the Bloomberg administration, the Post has learned.

Popular ex-top cop Ray Kelly has "been offered the job" and has "taken it," according to a reliable source close to Kelly.

It's not clear when the announcement will be made. Kelly refused to comment.

But Mayor Mike didn't hesitate to heap praise on the man who's been affectionately dubbed a "cop's cop" during an interview on NBC's "Meet the Press."

"He's a great guy," Bloomberg said.

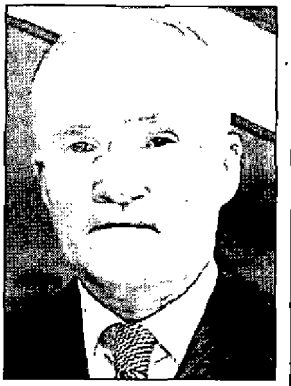
Kelly served as police commissioner under Mayor David Dinkins from October 1992 through 1993, and then went on to hold several federal law-enforcement positions before landing his current job as head of security for Bear Sterns.

Kelly also endorsed Bloomberg and served as his campaign adviser on public safety issues.

His apparent return to One Police Plaza would bring him full circle from a testy leave-taking after 16 months at the helm of a 31,000-member force.

Kelly had wanted to stay on — and had been widely praised for his handling of the first World Trade Center bombing crisis — but refused to lobby for the spot after Rudy Giuliani was elected mayor in November 1993.

And though he'd beaten out Beantown's Bill Bratton for the top spot under the Dinkins administration, Kelly lost out to him when Giuliani took over.



RAY KELLY
Comes full circle.

The new mayor also gave Kelly a little kick on his way out the door.

Early in his administration, Giuliani called the Kelly-managed NYPD lethargic and described as mismanaged his pet project — community policing.

Yesterday, Giuliani, marching beside his Republican successor at the annual Veterans Day Parade, was uncharacteristically quiet about Kelly's apparent return.

For his part, Bloomberg did his diplomatic best to praise outgoing Commissioner Bernard Kerik, calling him "a great commissioner."

"I think it's important to remember during the Giuliani administration, crime kept coming down. And every time it gets lower, you say you can't make it any better and Kerik shows us that's not true," he said at the Veterans Day march.

"There is always room for improvement."

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