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Salute to 'Miguel'

Puerto Rico embraces city's mayor-elect

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SAN JUAN — After spending a somber day with Dominican families of the victims of Flight 587, Mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg used his visit to Puerto Rico to show off his lighter side yesterday.

As students greeted him with music at Padre Rufo school, Bloomberg was coaxed into dancing with a young woman and then with Puerto Rican Gov. Sila Calderon.

Earlier, the mayor-elect — who prefers to be called Mike — was urged to consider a different given name.

"We in the Latino community in the City of New York have adopted Michael Bloomberg as our brother — he is now Miguel Bloomberg," City Councilman Joel Rivera (D-Bronx) said as Bloomberg beamed during a news conference in the governor's palace yesterday.

"We have a mayor that may not be Hispanic, but [he] is for the Latinos as well as for all other ethnicities in the City of New York."

Bloomberg, who succeeds Mayor Giuliani on Jan. 1, completed a two-day whirlwind visit to the Caribbean. On Monday, he met in the Dominican Republic with relatives of those who died Nov. 12 when American Airlines Flight 587 plunged into Belle Harbor, Queens.

Pledges support

Yesterday afternoon, as Bloomberg stood beside Calderon in the palace's stately Hall of Mirrors, he pledged his full support to New York City's Puerto Rican community.

"In some sense I will be, after Jan. 1, the mayor of the city with the largest Puerto Rican population in the world," said Bloomberg, noting that New York has roughly 1 million people of Puerto Rican ancestry — twice the number San Juan has.

"So my responsibility is to understand the Puerto Rican community, to be sensitive to their needs, to try to deliver to them the services that they and their children will require," he said.

Calderon, who met Bloomberg in 1995 when she became mayor of San Juan, said New Yorkers are "very lucky" to have elected him at this difficult time in the city's history.

"The city needed a tough businessman, and Mr. Bloomberg is a tough businessman," she said. "But he's also a man of compassion and a man with a big heart."

Calderon and Bloomberg promised to work together on a variety of issues, especially education.

Neither offered any concrete details.

During the news conference, Bloomberg and Calderon said they supported President Bush's stance on the island of Vieques. Bush has promised to stop controversial Navy exercises on the neighboring island by May 2003.

The 51st state?

Asked whether he supported making Puerto Rico the 51st state, Bloomberg said he feels the people of Puerto Rico should make that decision.

"I am a big believer in democracy and letting people decide how they should be governed," he said. "I will be a supporter of whatever they finally conclude."

Bloomberg aides have said the mayor-elect's trip was prompted by invitations from the governments of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

But Calderon said yesterday that Bloomberg initiated the trip.

He returned to New York on his private plane late last night.

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