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BLOOMBERG STARTS WITH AN A-PLUS

Mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg may be a newcomer to city politics, but he clearly has the instincts of a veteran. His appointments so far, and his demeanor in the face of difficult times, bode well for the next four years, sending a clear signal that his administration will draw upon talent from all sectors.

Heading the transition team is Nat Leventhal, the former president of Lincoln Center and an extraordinary candidate for a job which involves the appointment of the hundreds of men and women who will literally be running the city. After naming Mr. Leventhal, Mr. Bloomberg unveiled four more top-level appointments: Ray Kelly, David Dinkins' police commissioner in the early 1990's, will return to that crucial post; Marc Shaw, a veteran government operative, will be deputy mayor for operations; Dennis Walcott, who heads the New York Urban League, will be deputy mayor for policy; and Patricia Harris, a Bloomberg L.P. executive who was the hidden architect of the Mayoral campaign, will become deputy mayor for administration.

It's an impressive, inclusive list, free of mediocre time-servers and unqualified cronies. These appointees know and understand government, and yet they're hardly the kind of partisan political hacks who often wind up in powerful jobs because of blind loyalty to the boss.

Mr. Shaw's expertise as a former budget director under Mayor Giuliani will come in handy as the new Mayor grapples with a budget deficit that could be as high as $5 billion in the next fiscal year. Times are going to be hard, as hard as they have been in years, so Mr. Shaw, who has shown himself adept at handling budget crises and settling union demands, figures to play a powerful role at City Hall.

Mr. Walcott will advise the Mayor on education, health and social policy, areas that will be especially important in an economic downturn. Independent of the normal political machines, he is trusted and respected by all New Yorkers.

Ms. Harris' experience in the private sector, and the confidence Mr. Bloomberg has in her, will serve her well as she oversees City Hall operations and the city's parks and cultural institutions. This may be the first time in history that we'll have a deputy mayor who has the background to understand the importance of the arts and culture in the life of New York City.

Mr. Kelly, the once and future police commissioner, made a reputation for himself as a uniformed cop. More recently, he gained valuable experience in fighting terrorism as head of the U.S. Customs Service. He is humane yet as tough as they come, a worthy choice to lead the NYPD in the post-Giuliani era.

If this assessment sounds rosy, it is nothing compared to the optimism Mr. Bloomberg exudes as he prepares for the trial ahead. While there's no denying the looming deficit, he has continued Mr. Giuliani's very public enchantment with New York and belief in the city's ability to renew itself in a time of unprecedented uncertainty. If a man is known by the company he keeps, Mr. Bloomberg is off to a fine start.

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