

New York: Mayor Bloomberg hands out \$2.4 million in bonuses

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New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg has rewarded his top aides with a combined total of \$2.4 million in bonuses for their work on his reelection campaign, according to a recent *New York Times* report.

Among those receiving bonuses was Patricia E. Harris, the first deputy mayor and reportedly Bloomberg's most trusted aid. She received a total of \$451,000 including a \$400,000 bonus for less than two months "work" on Bloomberg's recent campaign for reelection.

Other top aides to receive six-figure bonuses include Bradley Tusk, Bloomberg's campaign manager, and Howard Wolfson—a top political aide to Hillary Clinton—who was the campaign's communication director. Both Tusk and Wolfson earned at least \$400,000 in bonuses, in addition to their salaries. The campaign's field director, Maura Keaney, also received a bonus of \$150,000. In all, 95 of Bloomberg's campaign staff members received bonuses.

The case of Patricia E. Harris, where the bonus essentially erases any line between a public official and the billionaire mayor's personal employee, has caused particular controversy within New York's political establishment. Underlying the stated concern is fear such open cronyism may generate opposition from working-class New Yorkers, who are bearing the brunt of Wall Street's crisis.

The *Times* noted, "Ms. Harris's pay raised the most questions, government watchdog groups said, because it amounted to a second salary for her work at City Hall, given her blink-and-you-miss-it stint on the campaign trail.

"The groups called the lavish pay package an alarming back-door raise for a government employee who already earns \$245,760 a year in her day job as first deputy mayor. Ms. Harris was on the campaign payroll for just 55 days, from Sept. 21 to Nov. 15, meaning that she was paid \$8,200 a day, assuming that she worked weekends and holidays."

Following the election, Harris went on to earn \$41,000 for just 46 days of "work" on Bloomberg's transition team in the lead up to his third inauguration. Clearly, Harris has been rewarded with hundreds of thousands of dollars not for any service to the public, but for her loyalty to the mayor and her

dedication to his private interests.

Tusk and Thompson were both well compensated even before they received their bonuses. Tusk's salary was over \$300,000, while Wolfson's firm raked in nearly half a million dollars last year for services provided to the Bloomberg campaign.

According to the *Times*, "The records show that, in addition to Ms. Harris, several other city officials took time off from their government jobs to join the campaign, later receiving bonuses.

"Government watchdog groups worry that the lavish pay makes the employees loyal first to Mr. Bloomberg, rather than to the public."

Susan Lerner, head of Common Cause/New York told the *Times*, "He has completely warped the expectation of what the bargain is when you enter public service."

Indeed, the manner in which Bloomberg has managed to essentially purchase the support of various layers of the political establishment in New York City, ranging from political parties, to advocacy groups and government employees, illustrates the workings of the modern-day oligarchy. In the run up to the election, Bloomberg bought off community and religious groups, as well as other politically connected organizations. He also purchased the services of leading Democratic advisors to run his campaign against his Democratic challenger, William Thompson, who was the city's comptroller.

Bloomberg embodies the super rich who rule openly with no regard for how their policies are perceived by ordinary working people. They buy up offices through which they can ruthlessly defend the interests of their class of billionaires at the expense of the working class.

The bonuses have come as a surprise to many observers in light of the very small margin of victory in the election last November. Bloomberg won the election by just 4.6 percentage points, in spite of the fact that he massively outspent his Democratic opponent.

The *Times* noted, "Mr. Bloomberg, whose personal fortune is estimated at \$16 billion, has always paid his campaign

staffers generously. But his 4.6 percent victory margin had fueled speculation that he would slash his customary bonuses. In fact, he increased them.” Considering that Bloomberg doles out much more money to his campaign staffers than the average politician, landing a position on a Bloomberg election campaign has become a road to riches for many of his aides.

In a vain attempt to justify the bonuses, Howard Wolfson tried to present Bloomberg’s victory as a major triumph in a time when incumbents around the New York area were being voted out due to the widespread discontent stemming from the economic crisis. He described Bloomberg as being “extraordinarily pleased with the result and campaign.” In reality, the fact that he won by just 4 percent demonstrates how fragile the façade of social and political stability is in the city.

Bloomberg spent over \$100 million of his personal wealth in last year’s election and has spent a combined total of over \$250 million in his last three elections. Bloomberg has increased his wealth by billions of dollars since he first assumed office in 2001, and he is now the richest man in New York City.

The corporate-controlled media has emphasized the amount of money the Bloomberg campaign lavished on television advertising as the primary reason for his defeat of Thompson. In all, the campaign spent \$34.4 million on television commercials. Bloomberg’s ads were designed to create an aura of inevitability around his reelection. Prior to the election, Bloomberg was able to overturn term limits with the support of leading Democrats and the majority of the city council.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted in an article published last November, “All of Bloomberg’s money would have done him no good, however, if there had been a political alternative. Though Bloomberg’s brazen vote-buying shows the corrupt character of capitalist politics, equally important is the fact that his opponent represented the same essential policies. The Democrat Thompson is a run-of-the-mill big business politician, who had no quarrel with Bloomberg until the latter decided to upend term limits and run for a third term.”

Thompson’s campaign was half-hearted at best, and the city comptroller could barely bring himself to criticize the billionaire mayor. President Obama’s “endorsement” of Thompson was so tepid it amounted to de facto support for Bloomberg.

The disgust generated by the policies of the ruling elite among New York City’s working people was demonstrated by the very small number of people who bothered to cast a vote. The total number of votes Bloomberg received was the lowest in absolute terms for any successful mayoral

candidate in New York since 1917, when the city’s population was only 5 million, and women were still denied the right to vote.

The fact that Bloomberg was able to easily buy the election has sparked widespread resentment among ordinary New Yorkers, resentment that has been largely ignored by the media.

Some sections of the ruling elite are worried that Bloomberg’s actions are too brazen, especially in light of the ongoing economic crisis that has made life increasingly difficult for the working people of New York. The official unemployment rate in the city is over 10 percent, and thousands of workers and families are being driven into poverty.

Last year saw a record number of individuals and families sleeping in the city’s homeless shelters, while thousands of multi-million dollar luxury units remain vacant. Bloomberg hasn’t enacted a single policy to assist workers and their families, while adding billions to his own personal fortune and enriching a handful of his cronies in the process.

Instead, city and state authorities are moving ahead with school closures and drastic cuts in transit service, including the elimination of the free student fare cards upon which hundreds of thousands of young New Yorkers depend to get to school.

The fact that Bloomberg is handing out such inordinate bonuses in the current context of rising social misery demonstrates how little appearances matter to the billionaire mayor. In this regard, his class outlook is indistinguishable from that of the executives at Goldman Sachs and other Wall Street firms that are doling out billions to their top employees.

There is no better example of how a ruling class that is doomed tends to ignore reality. In the coming months, the open corruption and callous disregard for the lives of workers displayed by Bloomberg and the ruling elite may help transform popular resentment into a social explosion.



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