

New York's Mayor Bloomberg announces 10,000 job cuts

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New York's billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg unveiled plans Thursday for eliminating the jobs of 10,000 city workers and slashing spending by nearly \$1.6 billion.

These drastic attacks on the city's workforce and vital services are to be carried out between now and the end of the next fiscal year, in June of 2012, with virtually every city agency affected.

Fire fighting, schools, aid to children, care for seniors, youth jobs, libraries, cultural institutions, parks and road repair are all on the chopping block.

Only the New York Police Department has been spared the ax based on the evident conclusion that with the sweeping attacks on social services and rising unemployment, policing the yawning social divide between the city's layer of billionaires and multi-millionaires and the millions living in poverty will be at a greater premium than ever.

The latest announcement of drastic austerity measures came in the city's annual November review of the financial plan for the current fiscal year and an updating of a four-year financial plan. It marks the ninth round of budget cuts since the Wall Street meltdown of 2008 blew a huge hole in the city's revenues. It includes the most severe cuts proposed since the onset of the crisis, reflecting in part the drying up of federal stimulus money at the end of this fiscal year.

The mayor's plan will slash \$585 million from spending in the current fiscal year, and \$1 billion from fiscal 2012, which begins next July.

The aim in inflicting what will be suffering for thousands of laid off workers and millions of other New Yorkers is to only partially close a \$3.3 billion budget gap. Bloomberg, New York City's richest individual, could cover the entire deficit out of his own pocket and have \$15 billion left over.

In a statement accompanying the latest cutback and layoff proposals, Bloomberg bragged of "never shying away making the hard decisions," by which he means deciding to place the full burden of the crisis created by his fellow Wall Street billionaires squarely on the backs of the working class and most impoverished sections of the population.

"More spending reductions are going to be necessary," said the mayor, "and we are going to continue to reduce the number of employees we have by not filling positions—we simply cannot afford the size of our current workforce."

Together with the cutbacks, the mayor issued a new edict to all city agencies, restricting new hiring to one employee for every two jobs that are eliminated, providing that funding is available.

Bearing the brunt of the attacks are the city's schools. The school system is facing the elimination of 6,166 teachers' and other education jobs, out of a total workforce of 135,000. At least 4,278 of these cuts will come through layoffs and the rest through attrition. The Department of Education is being hit with a \$350 million budget cut, even though the city is actually increasing its school spending. The schools face the loss of \$853 million in Federal stimulus funding, which is only partly being made up. Before increasing its spending on education, the city had projected 10,000 teacher layoffs.

The layoffs will only exacerbate a growing crisis in class sizes in New York City's schools fueled by previous budget cuts and reductions in teaching staff. The rising numbers of students in the city's classrooms have made a mockery of a 2007 agreement settling a lawsuit brought by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity that was supposed to reduce class sizes.

According to the latest Department of Education figures reported Thursday, the average class size citywide rose 2 percent, to 23.7 students, compared to 22.9 last year, with

middle school classes averaging 27, compared to 26.1 a year ago. High school classes average 27 students.

Among Bloomberg's other proposals is shutting down 20 fire stations at night. A plan that the mayor attempted to push through last year that would have shut down 20 fire companies altogether was met with vocal resistance from residents in the affected neighborhoods and was quashed when the City Council restored funding. The nighttime closing will be equally unpopular, threatening loss of life as response times for fire companies that remain open inevitably rise.

Independent studies have made clear not only the socially but also the economically destructive character of cutting back on fire service, which is responsible each year for saving billions of dollars in property that would otherwise be destroyed.

Some 200 jobs are to be eliminated from the Administration for Children's Services, which is responsible for the welfare of the city's poorest and most vulnerable children. Funding for homemaking services, which provides aid to at-risk families, is to be slashed.

The city's already overburdened library system will be hit with \$20 million in cuts, forcing virtually all of them to eliminate service for an additional day each week. Even during the depths of the Great Depression, the city was able to keep libraries open seven days and 72 hours a week. Now many will be cut to five days, with their doors open less than 40 hours a week. The cuts are being implemented under conditions of ever rising demand from public school students in need of internet access and a place to go after school as well as adults using library resources for job searches.

The city's youth face severe cuts under the budget plan, with 2,140 summer jobs being eliminated and 30 percent of funding for programs carried out during school vacations being slashed.

The Department of Cultural Affairs is being hit with \$20 million in budget cuts, with 190 workers being laid off at the city's cultural institutions.

Funding and jobs are being cut from the Department of Aging, which will mean elimination of services for older New Yorkers, particularly those dependent upon home assistance.

The city's Department of Parks and Recreation will cut the work year from 12 months to nine months for 1,468 full-time parks workers, forcing them onto three month unpaid furloughs during the winter months.

Hundreds of other workers are to be laid off in the Finance Department, the Department of Transportation and other city agencies.

While taking a meat ax to the city's work force and services upon which millions of workers depend, Bloomberg has steadfastly ruled out any increase in taxes on the city's financial aristocracy of which he is the wealthiest member.

Bloomberg has spoken out in favor of extending the Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest 2 percent of the population and has opposed any proposals for even marginal increases in city or state taxes on New York's super-rich elite.

"Let's go on with the tax cuts for another couple of years," Bloomberg said recently on "Meet the Press," a policy that would personally net him millions of dollars in additional wealth.

Recently, Bloomberg spoke vehemently against a proposal to close a loophole that exempts hedge fund managers who work in the city but live outside it from taxes on their multi-million-dollar bonuses, claiming that they would take their operations elsewhere.

At the same time, the billionaire mayor implemented a regressive sales tax increase last year that imposes the greatest burden on working people.

While the city's work force is facing some of the most severe attacks since the 1930s, New York state Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli announced this week that Wall Street is projected to rake in at least \$19 billion in profits this year, making it the fourth best year ever, and that year-end bonuses for multi-millionaire financial executives and traders will likely set a new record.



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