Mayoral Candidates React Lukewarmly To City Hall Plan On Retroactive Raises

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Several candidates who want to succeed Mayor Michael Bloomberg have responded lukewarmly to City Hall's plans to offer new contracts to city employees in exchange for foregoing retroactive pay increases.

City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, the Democratic frontrunner, said in a statement to the Gotham Gazette that she supports fair compensation for city workers and a dialog between union leaders and the administration.

"At the same time," she said, "we must always be mindful of the city budget, and honor our obligations to NYC taxpayers, and should strive to reach agreements that are fair to all parties."

Independence party candidate and former Bronx borough president Adolfo Carrión also supported ongoing talks balanced with fiscal restraint, as did Republican candidate and former MTA chief Joe Lhota.

"I applaud the mayor for making contract negotiations a priority," Lhota said. "Getting contracts in place for the city's workers that are fair and fiscally responsible is in the best interest of all New Yorkers."

City comptroller and Democratic mayoral candidate John Liu invoked Bloomberg's remaining tenure in a statement to the Gotham Gazette, calling the proposal "last-minute maneuvering" as well as "unseemly and outrageous."

He said the proposal "sends a clear message."

"The Bloomberg administration refuses to deal with the multi-billion dollar labor mess of its own making and will continue the 'kick the can down the road' approach for the next eight months," Liu said in his statement.

Fellow Republican candidate and Doe Fund founder George McDonald also issued a statement, pledging that he would not sign any new union contracts that don't include employee participation in health care.

Supermarket mogul John Catsimatidis declined to get involved in the matter, with the Republican candidate saying that he would look at the issue after January 1, 2014.

Public Advocate Bill de Blasio and former Comptroller Bill Thompson were both contacted for comment, but neither campaign provided a response by Thursday morning.

Cas Holloway, New York City's deputy mayor for operations, laid out the administration's initial offer to city employees earlier this week during a meeting with the the Citizens Budget Commission.

The Bloomberg administration preempted negotiations with municipal unions by offering to settle new contracts with new wages in exchange for preconditions.

"The city is prepared to agree to a new contract with any union that agrees to no retroactive, recession-era pay increases — which we cannot afford — and to meaningful healthcare benefit reform that improves the quality of care and reduces costs," Holloway said in a statement.

Municipal unions would have to ask their members to contribute to their health care insurance

premiums, with the city also announcing a plan to seek a new healthcare plan by opening up a requests for proposals. Unions would also have to drop demands for retroactive pay for those workers who have worked without contracts, some as long as three or more years.

In an interview with Capital New York , Municipal Labor Committee chief Harry Nespoli pushed back on Holloway's justification for no back pay, calling the argument that workers should count themselves lucky "that they have a job is a disgrace," and that Bloomberg only has "277 more days left in this administration."

The mayor's office said that the total cost for recession-era raises for all municipal union employees could be as high as a $8 billion. Holloway preemptively responded to complaints about no retroactive pay by arguing that the administration protected workers' jobs in the midst of the national recession.

Wherever the administration's prerequisites for negotiation leads, the city's largest labor unions are preparing for Bloomberg's replacement. The United Federation of Teachers' members have worked without a contract since 2009 and are poised to weigh in on the mayoral race.

With more than 200,000 members, UFT began releasing its 2013 endorsements via Twitter on Wednesday and tweeted it would soon announce its candidate for mayor.

UFT's Delegate Assembly votes to endorse in the mayoral primary. Candidate to be named later. Stay tuned.

— UFT (@UFT) April 17, 2013

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