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No more Mister Nice Guy

Hammered by gov, Mike goes on attack

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Mayor Bloomberg has finally decided to divorce himself from Gov. Pataki - partly because he can, and partly because he must.

With his poll numbers sagging, Bloomberg has changed his tone in recent weeks, going into attack mode for the city.

It's a strategy shift that even the normally placid Team Bloomberg is beginning to concede is necessary if the mayor wants to win back disgruntled voters. It's also a change that has Bloomberg in frequent opposition to Pataki, a fellow Republican.

Since the spring, the governor has fought the city on everything from homeland security to the city's budget. Last week, Pataki created a panel to help decide how much school aid the city should get, yet he appointed no City Hall representatives.

The growing divisions have forced Bloomberg to stake out ground that is in opposition to the governor, injecting a new, adversarial tone into their relationship.

"Nobody should ever make the mistake that I'm not going to stand up and do everything I can to get the maximum resources for this city," Bloomberg vowed last week, calling Pataki's new panel "ridiculous" and "a cruel hoax."

That kind of language is a distinct break for Bloomberg, who spent much of his first year protecting Pataki from any talk of taxes or other tough issues.



Bedford for NEWS

Gov. Pataki and Mayor Bloomberg were side-by-side at a downtown ribbon-cutting, but Bloomberg has made it clear they are no longer sweethearts.

At the same time, Pataki has become a safer target for Bloomberg. The governor lost a public battle with the Legislature over the budget; he is no longer in an election year, and some of his policies - his opposition to allowing the city to refinance its debt from the 1970s fiscal crisis, for example - seem directly aimed at hurting the city.

In public, the mayor is still trying to make the separation look as amicable as possible. The two men were together at a ribbon cutting on Friday in lower Manhattan, where, as dignitaries spoke, they whispered jokes to each other like school children.

But behind the scenes, aides say Bloomberg is seething, not so much because Pataki has chosen to fight him, but because of the stealthy manner in which Pataki has often chosen to do it.

The mayor learned of the school panel through an intermediary less than an hour before it was announced. And he got no warning at all when Pataki filed suit last month in a bid to block the city from selling \$500 million in new bonds.

No pushover

Pataki also raised last-minute concerns about Bloomberg's successful bid to get more homeland security dollars for the city from Washington, nearly scuttling the whole deal.

"The mayor very much wants to have a working and productive relationship with the governor," said one City Hall insider. "But he is not going to be taken advantage of."

In many ways, fighting is what New York mayors have always done with their Albany counterparts.

"Taking on a Republican governor has a certain logic, because [Bloomberg's] constituency at the end of the day is Democratic and independent," said Gerald Benjamin, a political science professor at SUNY New Paltz.

Until now, Bloomberg has let others - notably City Council Speaker Gifford Miller (D-Manhattan) and city Controller William Thompson - be the ones to challenge Pataki.

But that just cedes valuable ground to the two Democrats, each of whom is weighing a run for mayor in 2005.

"It's a matter of calling it like he sees it," Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D-Manhattan) said of Bloomberg. "And of letting the governor know that, 'If you hit me, I am going to hit you back.'"

"This governor has a record of working very well with others," said Pataki spokeswoman Lisa Stoll. "And we are not interested in getting into the griping."

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