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Mayor's \$84B Budget Braces New York For Trump Attack on Sanctuary Cities



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Demetrius Freeman/Mayoral Photography Office

By Jeff Mays

CITY HALL — Mayor Bill de Blasio unveiled a \$84.67 billion preliminary budget for fiscal year 2018 Tuesday that includes money to pave 1,300 miles of road, adds 40,000 new classroom seats and boosts financial reserves to record levels in case of potential federal funding cuts from the Trump administration.

The city is in danger of losing federal funding because of a pledge by President Donald Trump to cut funding to sanctuary cities that allow undocumented immigrants access to social services without having to reveal their status and refuse to cooperate with federal immigration authorities.

The mayor has been outspoken in promising NYC will remain a sanctuary city and protect undocumented immigrants.

"I believe he respects strength and responds to strength, not weakness," de Blasio said Tuesday in explaining his stance.

But the city is preparing for the unexpected. Overall reserves are at an all-time high with \$1 billion in the general fund, \$4 billion for the retiree health benefits fund and \$250 million in capital reserve. All of it can be tapped in case of an emergency, said the mayor.

The city has already identified \$1 billion in savings and agencies are being asked to find an additional \$500 million.

"There are no Trump-specific adjustments in the budget," said de Blasio explaining that the city prioritized things it values such as traffic safety and improvements in police training. But he doesn't "minimize" the "threat" posed by potential federal cuts.

"While we are waiting for the situation in Washington to develop, we have to keep moving," said de Blasio.

Among the priorities the city is tackling is spending \$495 million to add 38,457 new school seats. The new seats are needed to keep pace with a growing city where every borough experienced population growth from 2010 to 2015 and the net population growth was almost 5 percent.

The city will also spend \$6.3 million to hire 100 school crossing guard supervisors and 200 new school crossing guards by June of this year. The new guards are enough to cover every post in the city.

The NYPD, with whom de Blasio has had a tumultuous relationship, will receive bullet-resistant windows in the driver and passenger side of patrol cars. The \$10.4 million project will be completed within a year. The city will spend \$275 million over five to seven years to upgrade the Rodman's Neck firearms training facility.

On traffic safety, the city will spend more money on de Blasio's Vision Zero plan to end traffic deaths including \$317 million for street safety reconstruction projects, signal improvement and street lighting. Bike lanes will also get \$690,000 worth of improvements.

The city will repave 1,300 lane miles of road this year at a cost of \$147 million. Another 1,300 lane miles will be paved next year. By the end of June, the de Blasio administration will have paved 4,000 lane miles of road, the equivalent of driving from New York City to Costa Rica.

Also included in the budget is a plan to spend \$1 billion over the next 10 years to replace the roofs at more than 700 New York City Housing Authority buildings, affecting 120,000 residents.

NYCHA is in dire need of billions for backlogged repairs. City officials say the spending will repair 950 roofs and prevent dangerous mold from forming while reducing operating expenses. The \$1 billion comes on top of \$300 million over three years the city committed in 2015 to fixing NYCHA roofs.

Other spending includes:

- In order to get City Water Tunnel No. 3 up and running, the city will invest \$303 million to get it ready by the end of 2017.
- The city will spend \$162 million to help mitigate flooding in parts of Southeast Queens.
- The trash collection fleet will be repaired with \$329 million being used to prevent vehicles from breaking down frequently.

The preliminary budget was met with some praise and criticism.

Carlo Scissura, president and CEO of New York Building Congress, said the budget helps promote "the basic building blocks of a thriving economy" in the city.

"The strategic investments in infrastructure, including the completion of all aspects of the third water tunnel, repair of city bridges, and repaving of roads, will have incredible long-term impacts," said Scissura.

But Bronx Councilman Ritchie Torres, chair of the City Council's Committee on Public Housing, called the plan to fix NYCHA roofs inadequate given the agency's massive capital backlog.

"The 10-year \$1 billion commitment is but a small drop in the bucket to address NYCHA's \$17 billion capital need," Torres said. "If the city can invest millions in projects like a street car, it can certainly invest more in public housing to ensure it is protected for future generations."

Leonie Haimson, executive director of Class Size Matters, said the 40,000 school seats promised by the mayor represent a cut of 10,000 in the current five-year plan.

"The mayor's announcement is symptomatic of chronic underfunding and inadequate planning for the future, and will likely lead to even worse overcrowding given the rapid pace of residential development and enrollment growth," said Haimson.

Comptroller Scott Stringer released an audit that said [\\$7 billion in federal funds was at risk](#), including 61 percent of the NYPD's counterterrorism budget, which is paid for with federal funds, and money for affordable housing, child protective services and HIV/AIDS prevention.

Stringer said his office was working on a full budget analysis but that the threat from Washington was real.

"The uncertainty surrounding future policy decisions by the Trump administration and the Republican Congress presents real risks to our city budget," Stringer said in a statement. "We also must be smart about spending in good times so we are prepared for when tougher times arrive," he added.

De Blasio said he saw five major areas where the Trump Administration and Republican controlled Congress posed a major threat: police funding, public health funding for the city's hospital system, education, environmental protection efforts and affordable housing.

"Could we confront something absolutely unexpected from Washington? Yes we could," said the mayor.