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## Biggest Union Is Said to Back Bloomberg Rival

By [MICHAEL BARBARO](#)

In a snub to Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#), New York City's largest municipal union voted to endorse Comptroller [William C. Thompson Jr.](#) for mayor on Wednesday night, giving the Democratic candidate crucial labor support, said two people briefed on the matter.

The union, [District Council 37](#), represents 120,000 city government workers, mostly in nonuniformed jobs, like social workers, secretaries, engineers and accountants.

In 2005, the union broke with its tradition of endorsing Democrats and backed Mr. Bloomberg, then a Republican, privately arguing that the mayor was likely to trounce a weak field of Democratic candidates.

Many expected the district council to do the same this time, especially since Mr. Bloomberg appears to be steamrolling toward re-election and granted DC 37's workers back-to-back 4 percent raises last fall, despite the economic crisis.

But disputes between DC 37 and the Bloomberg administration, which have simmered throughout the second term, appeared to boil over during the endorsement process, giving Mr. Thompson an opening, according to those who have spoken to the union's leaders.

And Mr. Bloomberg's sobering address to the union's executive committee on Wednesday night, in which he warned members, "You're going to have to learn to do more with less" because of the economic downturn, appeared to hurt, not help, his chances.

A representative of the district council did not respond to requests for comment Wednesday night. The union is expected to announce its endorsement on Thursday.

The union has assailed the Bloomberg administration for relying on outside contractors, arguing that City Hall has shifted work away from well-paid union workers.

It has protested his plan to create a new, less generous pension plan for new workers, saying it amounts to a pay cut.

And it has criticized elements of mayoral control of schools, which has tightened the city's control over thousands of the union's members.

The mayor has responded that outside contractors at times save the city money; that his control of the school system has benefited parents and students; and that pension reform is necessary to alleviate the crushing cost of retirement benefits, which account for 10 percent of the city's annual budget.

In a statement, [Howard Wolfson](#), a spokesman for Mr. Bloomberg's campaign, said: "DC 37 opposes pension reform, mayoral control of schools, and wants the city to hire more employees, even in a time of fiscal crisis. This is their job, so we understand their position. But these are clearly not things that the mayor could agree to, and so it's not surprising that they would endorse Mr. Thompson."

"The real question," he added, "is what promises Mr. Thompson made them and how much his promises will cost taxpayers."

A spokeswoman for Mr. Thompson, who is considered the leading Democratic contender for the party's nomination next month, declined to comment on Mr. Wolfson's remarks.

Mr. Bloomberg has already won endorsements from 20 public and private-industry labor groups. [Mr. Thompson's campaign](#) has endorsements from 11.

Given Mr. Bloomberg's success in courting labor, the district council's move could provide cover for other municipal employees' unions to back Mr. Thompson. Several large New York unions, like the teachers, firefighters and police, have yet to endorse a mayoral candidate and have warm relationships with Mr. Thompson.

But their leaders are torn between loyalties to a labor-friendly Democratic challenger (Mr. Thompson) and a labor-friendly independent mayor (Mr. Bloomberg). Despite complaints about job cuts and the threat of future pension reductions, labor leaders have found much to like in Mr. Bloomberg, who has given their workers generous pay increases.

Allies of Mr. Thompson said the backing from DC 37 would immediately elevate his campaign, which has struggled to attract media attention and campaign contributions as Mr. Bloomberg has hit the city's airwaves and mailboxes with campaign ads, political endorsements and policy announcements.

"It's an enormous endorsement," said Stuart Appelbaum, the president of the city's retail workers' union, which has endorsed Mr. Thompson. "There is a growing feeling that Bill Thompson can win this election."

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