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De Blasio Gave Staff Hefty Raises At Taxpayer Expense: Report

By Michael Gartland

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Mayor Bill de Blasio played Santa Claus last year at taxpayers' expense, doling out raises to almost his entire staff — with 92 exceeding 10 percent.

Of the 475 mayor's office employees scrutinized by the Empire Center for Public Policy, an Albany-based government watchdog, de Blasio doled out pay hikes to 447 in the 2016 fiscal year, which ended June 30.

Some were off the charts:

- Melissa Diaz, an office assistant who was promoted to “special assistant” and now makes \$92,250 — a 142 percent boost from the \$38,121 she had been earning.
- Quintin Hayes retained his “research projects coordinator” title, but saw his salary zoom 48 percent, from \$85,000 to \$126,000.
- Press secretary Monica Klein got a 39 percent bump to \$125,000 from \$90,000. She starts a leave of absence in a week to work on Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign.
- Gracie Mansion cook Felibreto Estevez got to bring home more bacon, too, going up 13 percent, from \$102,011 to \$115,000.

“It adds up to a whole lot of money,” said Tim Hoefer, the Empire Center's executive director. “Here we are, talking about \$2 million [in raises] in the mayor's office alone.”

Experts said City Hall's free spending doesn't jibe with state and national trends.

“It's definitely greater than the increase in the cost of living this year,” said Maria Doulis of the Citizens Budget Commission.

From 2015 to 2016, the consumer price index in New York state rose by 0.68 percent, according to state Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli. Nationwide, wages went up 2.6 percent during the same period.

Doulis noted there's nothing preventing the mayor from awarding raises as he sees fit.

Most City Hall employees got increases of 2.5 percent, a rate pegged to hikes won by DC 37, the largest municipal union.

But 21 workers hit the jackpot, with paychecks that soared by 20 percent or more.



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The mayor's office argued such generosity was needed to "retain skilled staff."

"We need to offer competitive wages and promote our employees when possible, which of course also results in a raise," said de Blasio spokeswoman Freddi Goldstein.