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CITY WINS HEALTH-BENEFIT CONCESSION

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The city yesterday won the right for the first time to impose co-payments on municipal workers who receive selected medical treatments -- a move officials hailed as a breakthrough that will save taxpayers \$200 million next year.

In an unusual side deal, the city agreed to temporarily spare the jobs of 1,000 workers facing layoffs, with the unions picking up the \$20 million tab by tapping a Health Stabilization Fund.

Over the next 90 days, both sides will explore other cost savings to save the jobs permanently, possibly through unpaid furloughs. Another 1,000 workers without permanent civil-service protection are still facing pink slips. Mayor Bloomberg boasted that the co-pays for those in the HIP-HMO medical plan had "never" been achieved before.

Pending a ratification vote, the pact would require those with HIP-HMO insurance to pay \$50 up front when they visit an emergency room and aren't admitted; \$50 for an ambulatory surgery treatment, and \$100 for a procedure at an in-patient facility.

Preventive dental care would also be eliminated.

Medical care for those in the GHI-CBP/Blue Cross program would be limited to in-network facilities.

About 550,000 workers and retirees are affected.

Bloomberg estimated the savings at about \$1 billion over six years. Chuck Brecher of the Citizens Budget Commission called the agreement a mere starting point for the concessions the city desperately needs.

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