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## De Blasio's Reversal on Adding Officers Stuns Allies and Skeptics

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Meeting privately with city lawmakers last month, Mayor Bill de Blasio was blunt: He had no plans to expand the New York Police Department.

Relieved, one staunch police critic came forward to thank the mayor, even as she acknowledged they held differing views about the police.

"So long as we are in the same place," the mayor said to the critic, Councilwoman Inez Barron of Brooklyn, "it doesn't matter how we got there."

Seven weeks later, Mr. de Blasio is in a very different place.

On Tuesday, hours after a late-night budget announcement that stunned both allies and skeptics in the Council — and even some members of his own administration — the mayor and his team were left to explain a perplexing question: How had public haggling over at most 1,000 officers resulted in the planned hiring of 1,297?

"There was not, like, a light shone down from the heavens," Mr. de Blasio, a Democrat, said of his evolution.

Yet 18 months into a tenure defined, increasingly, by the Police Department he pledged to reshape, Mr. de Blasio's reversal has returned him to a familiar tightrope, a liberal mayor facing down sticky questions about law and order.

Mr. de Blasio, who spent more than a year resisting calls from the City Council for more officers, presented a different argument on Tuesday. He cast the decision as an arrangement with his police commissioner, William J. Bratton, to expand the type of more sensitive, neighborhood-based policing he promised to make a hallmark of his mayoralty.

It was not a rationale the mayor had widely discussed before, even amid a rise in shootings and homicides in recent weeks.

"There were some meetings with the commissioner in the last few weeks where we went from a broader discussion of his vision to a much more detailed one that became very, very compelling to me," Mr. de Blasio said on Tuesday.

Mr. Bratton put things a bit more plainly.



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“There’s nothing I’ve asked for that I haven’t gotten,” Mr. Bratton, smiling, said as he strolled through the plaza outside City Hall.

Mr. de Blasio’s fortunes are closely tied to Mr. Bratton, and bolstering the police force can offer the mayor political cover in the event of an uptick in crime.

Still, the mayor’s team was prepared for some criticism, as police reform advocates held a protest at City Hall on Tuesday and fiscal watchdogs expressed concerns about the nine-figure cost of bringing in new officers.

With some left-leaning council members still befuddled by the surprise shift, the mayor and Mr. Bratton met with lawmakers for more than two hours, detailing expected changes. It came hours after an unscheduled morning appearance at Police Headquarters to trumpet the new employees.

Aides to the mayor said the decision to hire more officers had nothing to do with the recent rise in crime numbers. They said Mr. Bratton had made clear that additional resources would allow patrol officers to spend more time getting to know the residents they serve, away from the pressure of radio calls.

Many of Mr. de Blasio’s supporters acknowledged the bind he had found himself in, but cast the increase in department ranks as an opportunity.

“He was caught between a rock and a hard place, between the Council asking for 1,000 and his own commissioner saying yes, we need more,” said Bertha Lewis, a community activist and longtime ally of the mayor. She said she was comfortable with Mr. de Blasio’s move, calling it chance to “be very aggressive in diversifying the police force.”

The police announcement was the culmination of what is usually called the annual budget dance between the mayor and Council leadership — a term long derided by both.

Last year, Mr. de Blasio made relatively few concessions to the requests of the Council speaker, Melissa Mark-Viverito, and her members. But the hiring of more police officers this year, which Ms. Mark-Viverito had pushed for months, was only the beginning.

There was more money for libraries, school breakfasts, and services for veterans. The city’s beach season will be extended by a week past Labor Day, and parks advocates, who have had their differences with the de Blasio administration, said they were glad to see money restored for city gardeners and maintenance workers whose jobs were at risk.

All the added costs, however, had some fiscal watchdogs nervous. Carol Kellermann, president of the Citizens Budget Commission, said she was surprised that Mr. de Blasio, who had defined himself as fiscally cautious, had acquiesced to nearly every spending request by the Council.

“This is a lot of very well-intentioned but expensive spending,” she said.



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When Ms. Mark-Viverito gathered members of the City Council on Monday evening to outline the deal, she ticked off the highlights, but left out a crucial detail: how many new police officers would be hired.

Only after the speaker asked for comments did one member interrupt and ask for the number. Audible gasps and a smattering of applause followed. Some members of the Council's black and Latino members raised objections.

Councilman Antonio Reynoso of Brooklyn praised the budget package on Tuesday, with a caveat: Mr. Bratton must deliver, he said, on the promise to improve police relations in minority neighborhoods.

"Everyone is on the hook now," Mr. Reynoso said, adding, "He has all the resources he asked for."