Why Would a New York Mayor Want to Be President?

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It is no surprise that mayors of New York City do not move up the political ladder. Mayors and presidents are both executives, but they operate in totally different spheres. Each job requires distinct skills and is judged by different criteria.

A president presides over a vast government, but his power is based on persuasion. The mayor of New York City is actually in charge. The mayor runs a $70 billion government and has a direct relationship with the 8.2 million people who live in the city – and is responsible for the 54 million who visit the city each year.

Mayors fail when they seek higher office. That's because they are doers, not talkers.

No elective office can match the New York City mayoralty as a source of direct action to improve everyday life. Michael Bloomberg understood how to use this power to ban trans fats and smoking, redesign streets, finance a subway expansion, close failing schools, grade 25,000 restaurants and transform decaying areas into vibrant neighborhoods.

At the federal level, power is shared with the states and dispersed among three branches. While the judiciary is a check on both executives, the Congress can thwart the president at every turn while the city council – intrinsically weak – cannot.

So why don’t New York City mayors go to Albany? Because being mayor of New York City is a far better job than being the governor of New York State. It has far more power, and living in Albany is equivalent to political exile. Furthermore, in New York City, municipal power flows directly from the mayor: appointing almost all city commissioners; determining how much money the city can spend; controlling the municipally owned waterfront, parks and beaches; and educating more than one million school children.

Mayors may be tempted to run for governor or president, but it is a misplaced ambition. No governor has a global stage like Times Square or the Statue of Liberty, and presidents have only one enduring power: appointments to the Supreme Court. Richard Nixon and George W. Bush named justices who have exerted and will continue to exert more influence than either president did while in office.

The president does have enormous stature in the international arena – and in the war on terrorism – but even those powers are being eroded. Of course, there is nothing like a speech from the Oval Office to reinforce the
symbol of presidential power … but millions more watch the Super Bowl halftime show than see anything broadcast from the White House.

Mayors fail when they seek higher office. That's because they are doers, not talkers. Leaders, not presiders. They aren't right for the presidency, but they’re just what we need to run the world's greatest city.

- **The White House Would Be a Step Down**

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