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De Blasio Not Invited on Cuomo-Led Puerto Rico Trip

Governor takes delegation of officials to the island to discuss ways to help its debt crisis



Andrew Cuomo in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 2010. PHOTO: RICARDO ARDUENGO/ASSOCIATED PRESS

By **ERICA ORDEN** and **JOSH DAWSEY**

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A host of New York elected officials led by Gov. Andrew Cuomo will make their way to Puerto Rico next week, with a notable exception: New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio.

Mr. Cuomo's office said Monday that the governor would lead a delegation of prominent Democratic officials—Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. and City Comptroller Scott Stringer among them—to the economically troubled island to discuss ways to help Puerto Rico address its debt crisis.

Traveling at the invitation of Puerto Rico Gov. Alejandro García Padilla, according to Mr. Cuomo's office, the delegation will include finance experts as well as individuals with expertise in health-care restructuring, including Jason Helgeson, New York's state Medicaid director, and Howard Zucker, its health commissioner.

All of which makes Mr. de Blasio the odd man out, particularly given his political alliances with many in the group, especially Ms. Mark-Viverito, Mr. Heastie and Mr. Schneiderman.

The trip comes at the conclusion of a summer of feuding between the mayor and the governor, who have privately and publicly sparred over everything from the



Bill de Blasio PHOTO: ALBIN LOHR-JONES/PACIFIC PRESS/ZUMA PRESS

car service Uber Technologies Inc. to the handling of an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease.

A spokesman for the mayor said he wasn't invited on the trip but "feels strongly that the federal government should act to assist Puerto Rico." A spokeswoman for the governor declined to comment on why the mayor wasn't invited.

"Is it part of another confrontation between the governor and the mayor? Sure, anyone with a brain will tell you that," said Hank Sheinkopf, a

Democratic political consultant who worked for Mr. Cuomo's campaign but no longer advises the governor.

Puerto Rico has struggled with high unemployment and economic stagnation for about a decade, and Mr. García said earlier this summer that its debts are unpayable.

For Mr. Cuomo, the visit is a chance once again to align himself with New York's Latino community and enhance his political partnership with Mr. García Padilla, with whom he appeared during a trip to the island last fall and who endorsed Mr. Cuomo's re-election bid during a rally in New York.

Mr. Cuomo is "doing what anybody who has that kind of constituency would do. He's showing up in time of crisis. It makes him look compassionate," Mr. Sheinkopf said.

"The current situation in Puerto Rico has become unsustainable and is threatening the livelihoods of millions of people—many with strong connections to New York," Mr. Cuomo said in a statement. "This trip is about stepping up for Puerto Rico and its people, and I look forward to working together with our partners to help address this crisis."

It wasn't clear how Mr. Cuomo or other members of the delegation plan to address Puerto Rico's plight. Mr. Diaz said the trip would draw media attention to the island, and that the officials would discuss ways with Puerto Rican leaders on how they can draw more federal and state attention.

A lot of politics, said Gerald Benjamin, a professor of state and city politics at the State University of New York in New Paltz, is symbolic behavior.

"You show a thoughtful connectedness," he said. "Sometimes you can do substantive things. Sometimes you can't."

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