

De Blasio Taps Bratton to Succeed Kelly As Commissioner of NYPD

- [Story](#) THE CHIEF DECEMBER 9, 2013
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Posted: Monday, December 9, 2013 5:00 pm

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Ray Kelly's ears must have been burning Dec. 5 as Mayor-elect Bill de Blasio appointed his predecessor and long-time rival William J. Bratton as Police Commissioner. Both of them repudiated one of Mr. Kelly's signature initiatives. Mr. de Blasio said in announcing the appointment that the Bloomberg administration has used "an approach that has too often alienated communities...I don't think that makes us safer."

He was referring to the NYPD's aggressive stop-and-frisk program, which Mr. Kelly and Mayor Bloomberg said was a key reason for the historic drop in crime during the 12 years they have been in office. Critics said that many of the millions of stops were not legally justified and that the program made community residents reluctant to share information with police. A Federal Judge declared it unconstitutional in August.

Bratton Hit Sweet Spot

"Bill Bratton has proven that you can not only fight crime effectively but also bring police and communities together," Mr. de Blasio said. "He has combined the best of tradition and the best of innovation."

During his first incarnation as Police Commissioner under Mayor Rudy Giuliani, crime dropped 50 percent during his 27 months on the job, Mr. de Blasio said. (Mr. Giuliani eventually forced Mr. Bratton to leave due to resentment that his Commissioner was receiving so much of the credit for the fall in crime.) During a seven-year term as Los Angeles Police Chief following Mr. Bratton's New York stint, crime fell 54 percent, Mr. de Blasio said.

Some critics, however, during his time in New York accused him of being overly aggressive in minority communities. Mr. Bratton's introduction of CompStat, the statistically-based crime-analysis program that has been copied by many cities, was "the game-changer in New York City policing," the Mayor-elect said.

He quoted him as saying, "Stop-and-frisk is like chemotherapy: used in the right dose it can save lives. Used in the wrong dose, too heavy...it can backfire."

'Cops Can't Break Law'

Mr. Bratton noted that "police constitutionally cannot break the law to enforce the law. It must be done fairly, respectfully." He added that one of the cardinal principles of policing is to "prevent crime and disorder... without intruding unnecessarily into the lives of citizens."

He said he believed he would be able to change the NYPD culture on stop-and-frisk "in a very short time with increased supervision, training and a change in leadership."

Mr. Bratton said he would have three priorities: "maintain the low crime rates that New York has come to expect and has a right to expect...

ensure that this city remain safe against acts of terrorism" and bring police and community together so that there is "true respect and mutual cooperation."

The Patrolmen's Benevolent Association praised the appointment. "Commissioner Bratton has an international reputation as a problem-solver and innovator," PBA President Patrick J. Lynch said in a statement. "His problem-solving style has been to be inclusive of all parties affected by a problem and that's the best way to find solutions. We look forward to working with Commissioner Bratton to improve the morale of our officers and to support the shield we wear."

Sergeants Also Pleased

Edward D. Mullins, president of the Sergeants Benevolent Association, agreed, saying, "The new Mayor made a very wise choice in appointing William Bratton as his police commissioner. Commissioner Bratton's ingenuity and creativity was responsible for the tremendous turnaround that we've experienced in this great city over the past two decades.

He is an excellent manager who surrounds himself with highly qualified people. Although he has very high expectations of those who work for him, morale in the department was never greater than when he was the Commissioner."

Civil-liberties groups that had criticized Mr. Kelly for what they called an overly aggressive stop-and-frisk program and unconstitutional surveillance of Muslims also reacted positively to the appointment.

"We look forward to working with the new Mayor and Police Commissioner to ensure that fundamental changes are made to the NYPD, including a top-to-bottom culture shift that ends racial profiling and the abuse of stop-and-frisk," said Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union.

The Center for Constitutional Rights, which brought the suit that resulted in a verdict declaring the stop-and-frisk policy unconstitutional, said it expects Mr. Bratton to embrace remedies ordered by the Judge "as a road map to meaningful stop-and-frisk reform and changing the Police Department's relationships with the communities it serves."

'A Great Choice'

Eli Silverman, a Professor Emeritus at John Jay College of Criminal Justice who has consulted for police departments world-wide, said Mr. Bratton was a great choice. "I've always assumed that's who de Blasio would wind up with," he told THE CHIEF-LEADER. He said Mr. Bratton is adept at dealing with communities, has a proven track record, surrounds himself with good people and allows others to share the spotlight.

Jumaane Williams, a City Councilman who was a leading voice against stop-and-frisk, sounded a note of caution. "One of the most pressing issues facing Commissioner-Designate Bratton is the need to take the best of what was done during the Dinkins and Bloomberg/Kelly administrations, and repair the damage done during the last 12 years due to the arrogance and seeming indifference to community complaints, such as the NYPD's abuse of stop-and-frisk," he said.

"By many accounts, Commissioner-Designate Bratton had a mixed tenure during his previous role as Commissioner. While violent crime dropped, many communities of more color felt that Commissioner-Designate Bratton was not responsive to their needs. While CompStat was ingenuitive in focusing on areas of high crime, this race-to-the-bottom, hyper-focus approach led to the quota system, which is a central problem in stop-and-frisk."

Muslim Advocates, a national group that is suing the NYPD charging that its surveillance of Muslims is based on their religion rather than indications of terrorism, also expressed concern.

"While Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department, Bratton promoted stop-and-frisk practices and a widespread data-gathering and -mapping project targeting innocent American Muslims in Los Angeles, which was defeated only after public outcry and the intervention of then-Mayor Villaraigosa."

Bitter Rivalry With Kelly

With his wide experience and TV-friendly manner, Mr. Bratton is the closest thing the police profession has to a rock star. He and Mr. Kelly have clashed on several occasions. Mr. Bratton criticized Mr. Kelly's first term as Police Commissioner under Mayor David Dinkins, saying the department was "basically dysfunctional." In his second tenure as Commissioner, Mr. Kelly reportedly refused to take Mr. Bratton's calls.

In 2006, the NYPD and the Manhattan Institute co-sponsored an anti-terrorism conference, but when Mr. Kelly learned that Mr. Bratton planned to participate, he cancelled the NYPD's sponsorship and scheduled a rival gathering at Police Plaza.

More recently, Mr. Bratton has criticized the way the NYPD administered stop-and-frisk, saying poorly supervised Operation Impact rookies were making plenty of errors.

Mr. Giuliani appointed Mr. Bratton, who had been Chief of the Transit Police and had also run the Boston Police Department, to replace Mr. Kelly, who had served as Commissioner for the last two years of Mr. Dinkins's term. Mr. Giuliani had interviewed Mr. Kelly and apparently found him wanting.

An Early Housecleaning

At the start of his tenure then, Mr. Bratton fired four of the NYPD's five three-star Chiefs, leaving only the Chief of Detectives standing. The scuttlebutt was that the four did not sign on to his expectation of double-digit drops in crime. But he also tapped a number of up-and-coming police leaders, including John Timoney, who became the NYPD's youngest Chief of Department to date and went on to run departments in Philadelphia and Miami. Another member of his inner circle, John Maple, was elevated from Transit Lieutenant to Deputy Commissioner of Crime Control Strategies. Mr. Maple died of cancer in 2001.

"He's good at sorting out who's good and who's deadwood," Mr. Silverman said.