Center for an Urban Future

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OFF THE CUF

BRANCHING OUT

While Overshadowed By Other Initiatives, the Recent Decision to Restore Six Day A Week Library Service is a Huge Victory for New York and Will Help Boost the Competitiveness of the City's Workforce

LAST MONTH, MAYOR MICHAEL BLOOMBERG WON A SIGNIFICANT VICTORY when state legislative leaders agreed to advance his high-profile congestion pricing proposal. But the mayor's innovative traffic plan isn't the only policy initiative agreed to this summer that should produce meaningful long-term benefits for New York City. This past June, the mayor and City Council Speaker Christine Quinn struck a deal on a less-heralded initiative—to restore six day a week service to the city's public libraries—that should be recognized as a landmark achievement for boosting the competitiveness of the city's future workforce and improving the quality of life for untold numbers of seniors, parents, children and immigrants.

While most everyone supports libraries, few recognize just how significant they are in the context of workforce and community development. Yet, New York's three public library systems—Brooklyn Public Library, Queens Public Library and New York Public Library, which serves Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island—are much more than just places to borrow books. They foster reading skills in kids, assist adults in addressing skills gaps, help immigrants assimilate and bolster technology access for thousands of seniors and low-income individuals who don't have computers or the Internet at home. Libraries complement the public schools in improving student achievement by offering after school tutoring and other learning initiatives. And through initiatives ranging from GED prep courses and entrepreneurship workshops to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, they help equip adults with the tools they need to compete in today's knowledge economy.

Commentary/Op-Ed - August 2007

Branching Out

This Off the CUF essay argues that the decision to restore six day a week library service is a landmark achievement that will boost the competitiveness of New York's workforce.

by Jonathan Bowles

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