

thechiefleader.com

Roast and Resurrection: Scald Mayor In Absentia at Forum Hosted by Kerik

MARK TOOR

Bernard B. Kerik moderated a discussion panel on law-enforcement work April 6 “not only because he was Correction Commissioner, not only because he was Police Commissioner, but because he knows what the inside of a jail cell looks like,” radio host Frank Morano said in introducing him.

After spending years running those departments for Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Mr. Kerik, 61, served three years of a four-year sentence on a guilty plea to charges of tax fraud and making false statements regarding renovations paid for by mob-linked contractors at an apartment he owned in the Riverdale section of The Bronx. He was released in 2013.

Knows Both Sides

He wrote a book in 2015, “From Jailer to Jailed: My Journey from Correction and Police Commissioner to Inmate #84888-054,” critiquing both sides of the justice system. He has published articles and commented on police and prison topics, and he presents himself as an advocate for criminal-justice reform.

The four panelists agreed with Mr. Kerik, a Republican, that life for law-enforcement officers was getting harder under Mayor de Blasio, a Democrat. At times, the presentation turned into a hate-fest targeting Mr. Blasio, with some panelists and audience members at one point chanting “No way!” following a reference to the Mayor’s re-election campaign.

Asked by a CHIEF-LEADER reporter before the panel started how he was, Mr. Kerik replied, “Good.” Asked who invited him to moderate the panel, he said, “I was invited by AM-970.” Then he ended the interview.

“He doesn’t talk anymore,” said Neal Tepel, president of LaborPress, which co-sponsored Labor Appreciation Day, a series of panels by union leaders. The

discussions were held at the offices of District Council 1707 on Manhattan's West Side.

Two of the four panelists said they had no objection to Mr. Kerik's involvement. "This is a country of second chances," said Elias Husamudeen, president of the Correction Officers Benevolent Association. Michael J. Palladino, president of the Detectives Endowment Association, said he had no problem but declined to elaborate. Mr. Kerik was a DEA member as an NYPD Detective in the early 1990s.

'Breakdown in Schools'

Another panelist, Gregory Floyd, president of Teamsters Local 237, which represents School Safety Agents, said during the event that there has been "a breakdown of school systems." Administrators must gain approval from the Department of Education to suspend students, and his members are pressured to report crimes in such a way that Mr. de Blasio can continue to claim that offenses in schools are dropping, he said. SSAs who confiscate marijuana from students have increasing difficulty disposing of it without tying in the student's name or exposing themselves to prosecution.

Mr. Husamudeen said the jails have similar problems with the manipulation of statistics. "The agency has tried to change the way they record numbers," he said.

"Without School Security Agents in our schools, our children would not have a safe learning environment," Mr. Floyd said. But, he added, "the Mayor wants to use them as pawns" in keeping Federal immigration-enforcement officers out of the schools.

He also referred to a recent case of two young men who had lured a 17-year-old learning-disabled girl to a bathroom in a Brooklyn school and forced her to masturbate other boys waiting there. "Only when the media found out were the parents notified," Mr. Floyd said.

Mr. Husamudeen and Mr. Palladino criticized Mr. de Blasio's recent proposal to cut the city's inmate population 9,300 to 5,000, close Rikers Island and build jails in the boroughs to hold smaller numbers of prisoners.

Not Helping Employees

The plan by the Mayor and a similar proposal by a City Council commission "do

absolutely nothing for NYC correction officers or civilians within the jails,” Mr. Husamudeen said, noting that neither staff nor inmates feel safe.

“My concern with the Mayor’s plan is about reducing the prison population by 50 percent over the next 10 years,” Mr. Palladino said. “...Are we just going to open the doors and let those who should be incarcerated out on the street?”

He reminded the audience of two murders by people who should have been behind bars: the killings of Police Officer Randolph Holder in 2015 by a serial drug offender and Emergency Medical Technician Yadira Arroyo last month by a mentally-ill gang member who had 31 arrests.

“These are bad people who do bad things,” said Mr. Kerik of the inmates. “If you have problems, who do you call?”

Mr. Husamudeen said the size of the jail system’s Emergency Service Unit, which is supposed to reinforce officers during disturbances, had dropped from 400 under Mr. Kerik to “maybe 80,” adding, “Corrections is not prepared to handle a riot.”



The fourth panelist was Bo Dietl, a former NYPD Detective who now runs a security firm bearing his name. He has declared his intention to run against Mr. de Blasio as a Republican, and issued some of the harshest criticisms of the Mayor.

Dire Warnings

“If you vote for de Blasio, this city will turn into a toilet bowl and he’ll be somewhere else,” he said. He predicted that his opponent would “take the guns away from police

officers.” And he referred to Correction Commissioner Joseph Ponte, who came to the city after running the state correctional system in Maine, as “some guy who used to guard six moose.”

Mr. Kerik tried to pinpoint what had changed in the city. “Under Giuliani [law-enforcement officers] had the benefit of the doubt,” he said. “This Mayor does not seem to do that.” The union leaders agreed.

Mr. Palladino said that “once in a blue moon” when one of the millions of interactions between cops and civilians becomes ugly, “the last thing any police officer wants is to become the next viral video on YouTube.”

“Ten years from now we will be releasing children who are going to be criminals, assailants,” Mr. Floyd said. “Bill de Blasio will be off to his next job and leave us with the mess.”

The union leaders also agreed that young people are not taught discipline.

‘You Had to Shape Up’

Mr. Palladino recalled what he learned as a youth: “If you wanted to be a success you must make your behavior compliant with the law.” Now, he said, “the message of politicians is, ‘Do whatever you want. You have an entitlement. We will make the law compliant with your behavior.’”

Mr. Morano said he invited Mr. Kerik because of his unique perspective on the criminal-justice system. He said he had not received as much blowback as he had expected. He noted that during both of Mr. Kerik’s commissionerships, he had good relations with unions.

The smallest of them, however, the Assistant Deputy Wardens/Deputy Wardens Association, was sharply critical of his operating style, even as it praised his work in seizing weapons from inmates. Its then-president, Sidney Schwartzbaum, claimed Mr. Kerik’s philosophy was, “The ends justify the meanness.”