

Florida developer Don Peebles mulls challenging de Blasio in 2017

Updated August 19, 2015 9:28 PM

By MATTHEW CHAYES



Don Peebles appears at his Bridgehampton home on Tuesday, Aug. 18th, 2015. Photo Credit: John Roca

A Coral Gables, Florida-based real estate developer who was a donor to Bill de Blasio in 2013 says he is considering a 2017 challenge to the mayor's re-election.

Fed up with what he says is de Blasio's "disappointing" approach on policing, charter schools, economics, housing and more, Don Peebles, 55, says he's planning to make New York City his main home this fall and is exploring a Democratic primary run against de Blasio.

Earlier this year, Forbes magazine called Peebles "one of the most successful African American CEOs" and estimated his wealth at \$700 million.

"I look at where New York is today, and I look at the direction that Bill de Blasio is taking the city, and I'm very disappointed. I am disappointed and I believe a majority of the city are disappointed," Peebles said Wednesday from Bridgehampton, where his family has a summer home. "Bill de Blasio is an excellent activist, and he is far better suited for the role of public advocate than being mayor of the city. He's far better suited to be outside City Hall protesting."

Peebles gave at least \$7,200 to de Blasio's 2013 mayoral campaign, according to the city's Campaign Finance Board. But Peebles said he's soured on de Blasio: the mayor's plan for more affordable housing "will barely move the needle," and Peebles said de Blasio's recounting of the warning he gave his biracial son to be cautious around police was disrespectful to NYPD officers. He also cited de Blasio's antipathy to charter schools.

De Blasio spokeswoman Karen Hinton declined to comment on the potential challenge.

Peebles said he is willing to spend between \$5 million and \$20 million -- or more -- of his own money, "whatever it took to win."

He would have to spend a lot more, said Christina Greer, a Fordham University politics professor. Mike Bloomberg, for instance, spent \$73 million on his first run -- in 2001 dollars.

Another obstacle, she said, is that voters may not be "receptive" to a newcomer to the city.

But Kenneth Sherrill, a Hunter College political science professor, pointed to de Blasio's sagging poll numbers and said, "There are people who smell blood."

"It's not surprising that people who under normal circumstances would not be taken seriously as a mayoral contender would suddenly rush forward to add their names to the list," he said. He added: "Everybody joked about Mike Bloomberg -- until the night he was elected."