

Black Voters Should Reconsider Supporting De Blasio, Says Former Ally



By [Jeff Mays](#) | November 5, 2015 7:21am

MIDTOWN — Two years ago, real estate developer Don Peebles was making calls to get African-American friends and business associates to throw their support and money behind the rising mayoral campaign of Public Advocate Bill de Blasio.

"De Blasio was pointing out what all New Yorkers saw, not necessarily a 'Tale of Two Cities,' but a tremendous disparity economically," said Peebles, 55, who considered de Blasio a friend. "As an African-American, I saw that as a very critical issue."

These days, however, Peebles is so disappointed in de Blasio, he's putting out feelers about his own possible run for mayor in 2017.

Given his performance on issues such as minority contracting, charter schools and policing, Peebles said De Blasio — who featured his African-American wife Chirlane McCray and their two children prominently in advertising campaigns during his run for office and won election with 96 percent of the black vote — does not deserve the support of African-Americans or a second term.

"It was not my grand plan to run for mayor of New York, but I don't see a circumstance where I could support Bill de Blasio for re-election," Peebles said during an interview in the David Adjaye-designed Fifth Avenue office of his company The Peebles Corporation.

Peebles is expected to make a decision by the first quarter of 2016, according to sources.

Among his complaints, Peebles says de Blasio has failed to follow through on a promise to improve the percentage of contracts the city awards to minority- and women-owned business enterprises, or MBWEs.

He also feels de Blasio is being divisive when it comes to charter schools, which he feels are sanctuaries for poor black and Latino students in districts with low-performing traditional public schools.

And Peebles believes relations between the police and community are still poor even after de Blasio ran on a campaign to improve the situation. [Eric Garner's death](#), and the [tackling of tennis star James Blake](#) shows not much has changed, said Peebles.

Even so, de Blasio continues to enjoy sky-high support from African-Americans in polls.

De Blasio's overall approval rating hit a record low in a Quinnipiac University poll last week with 46 percent of voters disapproving of his job performance and 45 percent approving.

Only 28 percent of whites approve of de Blasio versus 65 percent who don't, the lowest numbers among white voters since de Blasio took office.

But among Black voters, 71 percent approve of de Blasio versus 21 percent who don't. It was the mayor's second highest approval rating among African-Americans since he took office in January 2014.

Peebles, [whose net worth is estimated at \\$700 million by Forbes](#), wants to change that by speaking out.

He has already spurred some action. In September, he wrote to Public Advocate Tish James, a de Blasio ally who has also criticized the mayor on minority contracting, asking her to investigate the city.

James is scheduled to meet with Peebles later this month to discuss his concerns, according to sources at the Public Advocate's Office.

Peebles feels the city's minority contracting efforts are so important because they are linked to all of his other criticisms of de Blasio.

"As an African-American I'm a big believer in upward mobility and that the government has a big role, a proactive role in advancing that upward mobility," said Peebles.

"De Blasio assured me and others that he was sensitive to those issues and would address them. The pathway to a better life for those who are living in poverty runs through economic opportunity."

The unemployment rate in the city for blacks males in the first six months of 2015 is almost triple that of whites.

Blacks and Latinos received only .43 percent of the \$13.8 billion in city contracts given out in fiscal year 2015, according to a report from Comptroller Scott Stringer.

Peebles got his start because he was awarded a contract to build a development in the struggling Washington, D.C. neighborhood of Anacostia by the administration of late Mayor Marion Barry. The city even helped Peebles secure office space.

De Blasio is focused on the "abstract world" of income inequality in an effort to improve his national profile, said Peebles.

"He believes the path to success for low income residents is to increase the minimum wage at Burger King," said Peebles. "I believe the better solution is to move them out of entry-level positions into better jobs that are careers. That means that we have to have more community based businesses that will hire them."

The de Blasio administration responded by pointing out that it awarded \$1.6 billion in contracts to minority- and women-owned businesses in fiscal year 2015.

Peebles called de Blasio's take on the minority and women contracting numbers "dishonest."

He said he'd appoint a chief contracts officer and a deputy mayor to oversee the issue.

He'd also foster the growth of minority-owned firms by partnering them with other more experienced firms, invite successful minority-owned firms outside of New York City to relocate here and challenge the private sector to increase minority contracting.

"If you look at the number of contracts that go to Latino and African-American owned businesses either there's systemic discrimination in the contracting policies of New York City or we as African-American and Latinos are innately inferior," Peebles said. "I know that's not the case."

Bertha Lewis, head of the The Black Institute and a founding member of The Working Families Party who supported de Blasio for mayor, said the administration "has not demonstrated" that minority hiring is a "priority."

"He never made a specific campaign promise on MWBE, but he talked a lot about income inequality and I think the poor city performance for many years in this area has to be front and center in any inequality policy and conversation," said Lewis.

"MWBE is not the only issue that African-Americans need to consider or care about," she added, "but if the mayor cannot significantly address MWBE then African-Americans will question his commitment on that front."

She added that if the numbers don't improve, support for the mayor from the black community in 2017 could "look a lot different than 2013."

Evan Thies, a political consultant and president of Brooklyn Strategies, said a strong African-American candidate should be a real concern for de Blasio.

"They could cut into his base and then allow the plurality of voters to choose someone else," said Thies. "Basically, white voters are looking around for their guy right now."

Christina Greer, a professor of political science at Fordham University, thinks Peebles, who lacks the name recognition of other possible African-American mayoral candidates such as Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, could be appealing to disaffected white voters.

"De Blasio is not doing well with whites at all," said Greer. "If (Peebles) can position himself as the person who genuinely cares about the 'downtrodden,' that would resonate with the liberal voters who thought that de Blasio was going to be this progressive champion that he's not."

The mayor's spokeswoman, Karen Hinton, said de Blasio was focused on his agenda of affordable housing, universal pre-K, safety and "significantly increasing minority and women business contracts" with the city.

Voters will decide all questions about support when the time comes," said Hinton.