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President Obama should take note of Mayor Bloomberg's small business reform

[Joanna Molloy](#)

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Elisa Miller for News; Mark Bonifacio/News

President Obama should study what Mayor Bloomberg has done, Joanna Molloy writes.

As President Obama prepares to speak to the nation Thursday night about unemployment, he might study what Mayor Bloomberg has done to fight it in New York City.

Weeks after being elected, Bloomberg launched Small Business Services, the department to help entrepreneurs start and grow companies in New York City.

Last year, SBS helped create or fill 31,000 jobs. This year's number could hit 35,000. About a fifth of those jobs are new.

Not huge figures, but better than the 500 a year the old City Job Centers got. And certainly bigger than last month's number of new jobs created nationally: 0.

That's 35,000 jobs for people who need them, in the middle of a recession they're not calling a recession. And after the feds slashed the SBS budget nearly in half.

So what has Bloomberg done that Obama hasn't? For starters, the mayor named Rob Walsh, the guy who transformed Union Square, to head SBS.

The first thing Walsh did was ask the mom-and-pops - there are 200,000 of them in the city - what problems they faced. Getting capital, they said. Check. Navigating bureaucracy. Check. Finding good workers. Oh, we can help you with that.

"We build up a reservoir of people who have come into our workforce centers who are 'job-ready,'" Walsh says. "Then we go to businesses that don't have their own human resources department and say, we will give you three qualified candidates for every opening you have."

They filled 50 jobs in four months for Schleppers Movers, from dispatchers to drivers. "We chased Mario Batali really hard to open his job search process to us," Walsh says. "We filled 200 jobs at Eataly, from the maitre d' to the guy cutting fish."

SBS did the same at the Atlantic Terminal, at the East Harlem mall, at Fairway in Red Hook, finding qualified workers who lived in the neighborhood.

SBS also does training, from résumé writing to technology to finance for aspiring entrepreneurs. "Someone may be able to bake a great cake, but know nothing about business," Walsh says.

"I was a banker for 20 years before I got laid off, but I didn't even know how to write a business proposal," says Dorit Nahmias, who is about to open a distillery to make Legs Diamond Whiskey.

"I took the four-week course at the Bronx SBS Workforce Center and it gave me the tools. They helped me incorporate, and they helped get me Chase as a lender. "I've never really dealt with the government before except to pay taxes. This was amazing."

Last year, SBS got 639 entrepreneurs loans totaling \$21 million, including Hotbread Kitchen, which hired mostly immigrant women to bake pitas, tortillas and paninis that were such a hit, Whole Foods carries them.

Bloomberg has pledged \$13 million and wants to add 10 more workforce centers.

Walsh isn't above dealing with the tiniest obstacle. "The manager at IHOP on 14th St. told me he had a permit stuck in agency limbo. We got him out. We are ready to help you in any way we can."

Bet you've never heard the feds say that.