

BLOOMY: QUIT IT, MITT

By MAGGIE HABERMAN and CARL CAMPANILE

August 14, 2007 -- Mayor Bloomberg yesterday told Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney to stop picking on the city's immigrants.

"Boy, let 'em come," Bloomberg said of immigrants.

Romney last week referred to the Big Apple as a "sanctuary city" that protects illegal aliens - and did so even when GOP rival Rudy Giuliani was mayor.

Romney vowed to cut funding to cities that protect illegal aliens if elected president.

Asked about Romney's comments, Bloomberg - who some believe is flirting with making an independent run for the White House - strongly defended immigrants, though he skirted the distinction between legal residents and illegal aliens.

"We don't have a future, we are going to lose the international battle to have science and education and medicine and creativity here if we don't have a constant influx of immigrants from around the world," Bloomberg said.

"Immigration is what's kept us alive and thriving. It keeps adding to our language and our culture and our cuisines and our religion. I can't think of any laboratory that shows better why you need a stream of immigrants than New York City."

Bloomberg said crime continues to drop in the city, schools are improving and the economy is thriving - contrasting that with what he sees as declining conditions in other parts of the country.

"If that isn't example enough as to why you need immigrants coming in, I don't know what to tell anybody," Bloomberg said. "If they don't believe that immigrants add a heck of a lot more than they cost, they just aren't looking at the numbers."

Romney's camp defended his comments.

"The major distinction here is one of illegality. Policies that encourage illegal immigration and create an amnesty zone that invites lawbreakers to cross our borders and ignore the laws weaken our nation's ability to secure our borders," said Romney spokesman Kevin Madden.

Grassroots Republicans across the country have urged a crackdown against illegal immigration.

Giuliani will discuss his immigration policy to bolster national security during trips to South Carolina, Iowa and New Hampshire this week.