



Mike grilled on his firm's 'bias'

By SALLY GOLDENBERG
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Mayor Bloomberg was on an unaccustomed hot seat for 4 ½ hours yesterday, grilled by lawyers for female employees of his worldwide information-services company who claim they suffered “severe” and “pervasive” discrimination after becoming pregnant.

“Mr. Bloomberg prides himself as a hands-on, detail-oriented owner, businessman and now mayor,” said **Richard Roth**, the lawyer for two of the more than 80 women who have filed complaints.

“We are determining if and when Mr. Bloomberg became aware of these issues, whether they were happening under his watch, and, if so, what he did about them.”

The closed-door deposition, originally schedule for the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission headquarters downtown, was transferred to the Midtown offices of Bloomberg’s lawyers, Wilkie Farr & Gallagher, in an attempt to throw off the press.

But reporters got wind of the change and staked out the entrance of Wilkie Farr on Seventh Avenue, only to be outmaneuvered by the mayor, who entered the building through a side-street parking garage on West 52nd Street.

The mayor is the majority owner of Bloomberg LP, but he gave up day-to-day management of the 10,000-employee company when he ran for office in 2001.

All the discrimination claims were filed afterward.

In the most recent complaint filed March 31, saleswoman Maria Mandalakis said that when she became pregnant and

told her boss she needed rest because she was bleeding, he shrugged off her concerns.

“He told her that the bottom line was that when [former Bloomberg LP CEO] Lex Fenwick looked at the numbers and saw that she was behind in her quota of face-to-face sales calls, Mr. Fenwick would not care that she was bleeding and her job would be in jeopardy,” according to the filing.

Bloomberg --- who is in the middle of a re-election campaign --- did not talk to reporters after the deposition.

But his company issued a lengthy statement detailing the pregnancy and child-care benefits it offers employees, described as “among the highest in the industry.”

“We intend to litigate this case in the courts, not the press,” the statement said. “We are confident once all the facts come out they will demonstrate that the claims have no merit.”

The company also hired a second law firm, Jones Day, to help fight the cases. Bloomberg, who sometimes gets heated during routine press conferences, was reported to be “cool” during the proceedings.

He is not a named defendant.

“The mayor is a very sharp and sophisticated person,” said **Roth**. “He happens to be a very good witness.”

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