

Mayor Emanuel? No time soon, ex-congressman says

By Don Babwin

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CHICAGO — White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, who says he wants to be Chicago mayor someday, was back in the city on Tuesday, but he wasn't looking for votes.

Instead, he was rubbing elbows with city leaders from around the globe at an event that's a pet project of Mayor Richard M. Daley, the very man he wants to succeed.

It was the first trip home for Emanuel after he said in a TV interview last week that he would like to run for mayor when Daley no longer wants the job.

A one-time Daley adviser and a former congressman, Emanuel said Tuesday he's eager to return to Chicago eventually.

"We have our home here and can't wait at some point in the future — don't over-interpret anything, don't everybody get excited — at some point, when we come back, which is always our goal," Emanuel told reporters after being on a panel at a forum with mayors from Paris and Philadelphia discussing innovative ways to run government.

But he tried to tamp down speculation about the timing when reporters asked him if he liked the sound of "Mayor Emanuel."

"I think you guys are way too excited. You guys have got to start drinking decaf," he said.

Daley, who was first elected in 1989, has yet to announce whether he'll run again next year, but there's no sign he has lost any enthusiasm for the job, calling it the "greatest" in politics.

At the end of his current term, the 68-year-old Daley will have been in office for 22 years and surpass his legendary father, Richard J. Daley, who died in 1976 after 21 years in office.

Daley said knowing Emanuel, 50, would like to replace him one day isn't awkward because the two are friends. "There's nothing wrong with ambition," he said.

Still, Daley isn't endorsing Emanuel as his heir apparent. "I think there are many people out there who would be great mayors," Daley said.

Alan Gitelson, a Loyola University of Chicago political science professor, said it's too early for Daley to endorse anyone as his successor. First, Daley's own election plans aren't known, and when Daley does eventually give up the job, different factions in the city will want it.

"Why at an early date in selecting someone would you want to alienate other individuals or groups of individuals?" Gitelson said.

Chicago resident Mary Brown, a 47-year-old certified public accountant, said she doesn't know enough about Emanuel to decide what kind of mayor he'd make, but she's not put off by his famously sharp personality and use of salty language.

"Nobody is afraid of a few curse words at City Hall," Brown said.

Meghan Maddock, a 29-year-old tax coordinator from Chicago, said she likes Emanuel.

"I don't know if he'd be a good mayor, but I like his personality," she said. "It's in your face, he seems to tell it like it is."

Emanuel couldn't escape a little ribbing about his mayoral aspirations while at the Richard J. Daley Global Cities Forum.

Moderator and journalist Judy Woodruff rattled off Emanuel's resume, which includes stints as a top adviser to former President Bill Clinton and as an investment banker, before telling the audience that Emanuel one day wants Daley's job.

"But the consensus is before that happens he's going to have to get some real experience," Woodruff said, getting chuckles from both Emanuel and the crowd.

Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, who had to borrow Emanuel's microphone during the panel discussion when his didn't work, joked that their exchange could be the genesis of a snappy campaign line.

"Just roll tape, this will be the first of many commercials: It only works when it comes from Rahm," Nutter said.

Emanuel took the ribbing in stride.

"I have two brothers, ribbing's fine," he said.