Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel discussed the successes and ongoing battles of his first 100 days in office during the Better Government Association’s LiveStream at Lunchtime held at Loyola’s Water Tower Campus on Wednesday afternoon.

During the nearly hour-long event, Emanuel insisted, “The change I’m trying to bring is that the city taxpayers are in the front seat, not the city payroll.”

When asked about the privatization of services, Emanuel said he wants private firms and city workers to “competitively bid” for city contracts.

“I believe the city workers can win,” he added. “They have to come in at good value price.”

Emanuel explained that the bidding process for city contracts will occur online through “reverse auctions,” which put companies in competition to work for the lowest price.

Emanuel also touted the increase in transparency he has brought to city government, specifically mentioning that the salaries and financial disclosure forms of city employees are now available online.

A key part of transparency is allowing Chicagoans to feel connected to what’s happening in city government, Emanuel urged. He explained that Chicagoans have used Twitter and Facebook to voice various problems to city government offices.

“Technology is a tool of empowerment. . . so people do not feel powerless to a nameless, faceless bureaucracy,” he added.

Andy Shaw, president and CEO of the Better Government Association, interviewed Emanuel during the event, which took place in the School of Communication’s convergence studio at 51 E. Pearson St.

Shaw questioned Emanuel about the proposed property tax hike for Chicago Public Schools, which, if implemented, would increase the annual tax bills of Chicago homeowners by 2.4 percent. Shaw specifically asked Emanuel why he would raise taxes before tapping into the $868 million of unallocated tax increment financing (TIF) funds.

Emanuel defended his stance by explaining that the school system has already cut $400 million in spending by making major changes and consolidations, and he warned, “they’re not done.”

Emanuel rejected the notion that the unallocated TIF dollars could help solve the financial problems of Chicago Public Schools, including their $712 million budget gap.
“The TIFs are a one-time thing. They don’t solve the problem. They don’t yield reform. Next year, we’d be back at it like ground hog day,” he said.

Emanuel called for a longer school day, an idea he has emphatically supported since the mayoral campaign. He said he will work to give Chicago youth a chance to further their educations and compete in the workforce.

“For too long, this system was about the adults and not the children,” he declared when saying he would not back down from his negotiations with teachers and principals concerning the expansion of the school day.

To learn more about the event’s sponsor, the Better Government Association, visit their website at www.bettergov.org.