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## Healey's mettle tested as mayor's point person on G8, NATO summits

By [Shia Kapos](#)

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Lori Healey (file photo).  
Photo by: [Stephen J. Serio](#)

Lori Healey, executive director of the Chicago G8 NATO Host Committee, approaches her work the same way she maneuvers Clooney, the horse she named after the actor and rides a few times a week and in dressage—English saddle—shows. An equestrian since second grade, Ms. Healey is disciplined and patient. Doesn't lose her temper. Always sticks to the script.

Her polite but firm approach (some call it a velvet fist) has carried her to top positions behind the scenes of government and business: She was president of the Chicago 2016 Olympics bid committee, chief of staff to former Mayor Richard M. Daley and head of the city's Planning Department. She's on leave now from Chicago-based developer John Buck Co., where she is a principal.

But even this “get things done” player will be tested as she oversees the back-to-back international summits planned for May 19-21.

Ms. Healey, 52, declines to comment for this story, but in a recent Facebook exchange with Olympian gymnast Bart Conner, she acknowledged G8/NATO “makes the Olympics look like a cake walk!”

That may be understating it. Ms. Healey will be expected to be both fundraiser and ambassador to the city. She will need to make sure dignitaries' expectations are met and events are scheduled and go smoothly. She will be the liaison to the White House and city and state governments, and she, along with former Sara Lee Corp. CEO John Bryan, will oversee the efforts to raise \$40 million to \$65 million. Ms. Healey will have to do all this knowing that the city's image will be shaped by the summits.

During Chicago's quest for the Olympics, Ms. Healey hit all 50 wards explaining to community groups why the city should finance the games. The grueling and time-consuming roadshow had critics but ultimately resulted in a unanimous City Council vote in favor of Chicago's financial guarantee—a feat no other U.S. city had accomplished before in the quest to land the Olympics.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel's administration, which has stumbled in nailing down plans for punishing rowdy protesters and training out-of-state cops to augment local ranks, hopes Ms. Healey can keep the G8/NATO ship on course. In the next few days, she will hold briefings, reminiscent of those Olympics gatherings, with community and business groups to explain how the international summits will play out.

This “is an unprecedented opportunity to showcase our great city to the world. Under Lori's leadership, the host committee will be one of the stewards of that message, welcoming visitors and dignitaries alike,” the mayor says in an email.

The administration hopes Ms. Healey can help win over critics who worry the summits will hurt the city more than help it.

"To have the two summits together for the first time in 30 years, 80 countries and 2,500 to 3,000 members of the press for the summit and leading up to it—we think it's a great opportunity to talk about Chicago and our position in the global economy," she said last week on the "Eight Forty-Eight" program on WBEZ-FM/91.5.

But the public-relations campaign for the summits is different from bringing an Olympics, or the Chicago Marathon or Air and Water Show, to the city. Those gatherings, though huge, are for fun and entertainment. They lack the unexpected landmines that a few thousand protesters can trip.

And unlike the Olympics bid, which touted jobs and occurred before the economic downturn, Ms. Healey and her team are likely to find the summits a harder sell to corporations.

### **'INCREDIBLY ADEPT'**

Friends and former colleagues say Ms. Healey, the mother of two adult children and a self-described Army brat (her father was a surgeon), is well-suited for all the challenges and surprises given her two decades in the public and private sector, her temperament and her finesse at working with people.

"She's incredibly adept at organizing disparate groups of government and non-government entities around a common purpose," says Kurt Summers, chief of staff to Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. He was Ms. Healey's chief of staff on the Olympics bid committee.

"Along with meeting with community-based groups, she was the person briefing President (Barack) Obama and the first lady in their meetings with (International Olympic Committee) members," he says. "You have to have the savvy to relate to international figures, and you have to have the knowhow to get things done and get cooperation from countless groups."

Mr. Summers says Ms. Healey wasn't afraid to stand up to her bosses, and he expects she'll do the same with the G8/NATO planning.

"She's a direct and firm person to deal with, but she doesn't do it in a mean-spirited or mean way," says Patrick Sandusky, chief communications officer for the Chicago Olympics bid. He recalls Ms. Healey and Chicago 2016 Chairman Patrick Ryan debating more than once. "She and Pat worked well together because no one had hard feelings after."

Jack Guthman, a longtime zoning attorney who chaired the city's Zoning Board of Appeals for 13 years, calls Ms. Healey "skillful" and someone with "a manner that's direct and firm. She's no-nonsense. There's no animosity or overt use of power."

The two got to know each other when she was the deputy commissioner of the city's Planning Department, which she would later lead.

Mr. Guthman remembers the two negotiating tax-increment financing for a South Loop hostel. Ms. Healey is often credited as designing Mr. Daley's TIF method of funding civic projects.

"We needed a substantial amount of money, but she wasn't in the business of giving the store away. The conclusion was an arrangement that was fair to everyone," he says. "That's the way it always was. No matter what side of the table we were on—opposite or on the same side—she was always smart and fair."

### **TAKING HEAT**

Last week, critics grilled Ms. Healey during WBEZ's call-in show, but she emerged from the Navy Pier studio smiling.

"Allen Sanderson gave me a shout-out," she squealed, referring to the University of Chicago economist who had been a critic during the Olympics process.

"She's good at delivering a stump speech, and she doesn't get off message," Mr. Sanderson said in an interview after the show. "I think she did a good job representing Pat Ryan, and she's doing the same for the police force and mayor right now."

*John Pletz contributed.*

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## What do you think?

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Nancy L. wrote:

I agree - who even cares about the G8 summit? The only thing I ever see are protests and police. What's the point? It looks like it's for three days.

1/23/2012 2:47 PM CST

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M K. wrote:

A trail of failed projects, and now she's rewarded role as chief Chicago administrator for w/G8-NATO conference.

1/23/2012 9:40 AM CST

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Darrell L. wrote:

These events (Olympics, G8, Nato summit, etc.) are just tools for former Daley acolytes to get more political jobs and contracts.

1/23/2012 7:51 AM CST

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Mike S. wrote:

"Chicago Police Department in such a disarray with the lack of leadership...a Superintendent who is more of a political puppet instead of a para-military leader..."

I like the new superintendent but even under Jody Weis the leadership was a lot better than the rank & file. Drunken brawlers, perjurers, thieves, DUI killers...they're a mess, and those are just the ones you see. Sure, they're ill-equipped to handle a major disturbance; they're ill-equipped to handle their own corrupt, crappy lives. You know what they call an honest, hard-working Chicago policeman? Rogue cop.

1/22/2012 10:28 PM CST

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James C. wrote:

With the Chicago Police Department in such a disarray with the lack of leadership (too many clouted individuals who got their stars and bars based on political clout, instead of real performance and merit), a Superintendent who is more of a political puppet instead of a para-military leader, and the unforgiveable lack of equipment and training, the G8 summit is looming as a huge disaster waiting to happen.

Ms. Healey better wake up and focus on getting the troops outfitted correctly with both the equipment and leadership they will need in order to keep the peace in Chicago.

Where is the \$55 Million of federal money earmarked for the G8 Summit going to? Better spend a lot of that money on riot gear and safety equipment instead of black-tie tea and crumpet get-togethers for the clouted elite.

Better start paying attention to the Chicago police who are saying they are ill-equipped to handle a major anarchy incident instead of planning what wines to serve with smoked salmon and capers.

Typical Crains reporters, focused on the frills and enamoured by political clout, instead of the hard-edged news. Bring back Mike Royko and Len O'Connor.

1/22/2012 3:53 PM CST

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Ken E. wrote:

The G8 summit for a couple of days?

Who cares?

And from the same folks who brought you the Olympics sideshow.

It is yet another circus to distract ourselves from the simple fact that our taxes in Chicago are confiscatory as government union bosses hasten the day of the city's bankruptcy with their demands. And all the while we continue to see 30,000 of our fellow citizens flee the city each year for venues with lower taxes and less bureaucracy.

Take on the unions and stop the distractions already!

1/22/2012 3:12 PM CST

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