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City Campaigns Grind to a Halt After Attacks

By DIANE CARDWELL

From the mayor's race to the contests for City Council, what had once been one of the most crowded and chaotic elections in the city's history has practically ground to a halt, leaving candidates in a state of suspension.

There will be a primary next Tuesday, but with candidates wanting to avoid offending voters in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center, they are, at all levels in the election, hamstrung in their quests for political office.

Most candidates, including the major mayoral hopefuls, stopped campaigning on Sept. 11, and the Campaign Finance Board ruled last week that participants in the program for city matching funds could not spend any more money in the primary with two exceptions. Candidates are allowed to spend the same amount they would have spent on the original Primary Day, for such things as printing literature and paying workers to distribute it. They can also spend money to replace or repair offices or equipment destroyed or damaged in the disaster.

But candidates have been avoiding the usual stumping anyway. While all six major mayoral candidates are participating in a WNBC-TV special that will air on Sunday in which each has nine minutes to make a statement, they are generally staying away from forums that might appear contentious.

"The public is rightly interested in what the candidates have to say about the tragedy that has struck New York," said Joseph DePlasco, a spokesman for Mark Green, one of the Democratic mayoral candidates. "The question is in what venue."

Jordan Barowitz, a spokesman for Peter F. Vallone's mayoral campaign, said, "We don't feel debate is appropriate."

In the Sixth Council District on Manhattan's Upper West Side, three candidates pledged not to campaign until at least tomorrow. One of them, Larry Sauer, said he would only campaign on behalf of getting people to vote, no matter for whom.

Meanwhile, officials at the city's Board of Elections are racing to get everything set up in time for Tuesday. Joseph L. Gentili, deputy director of the board, said that because of a measure passed by the State Legislature on Monday, some 300,000 voters living south of Canal Street would be able to use absentee ballots if they have been displaced from their residences or if their polling places have been relocated.

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