

NEW YORK POST, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2001

'UNITY' DEAL MAY LET RUDY STAY ON

By Fredric U. Dicker in Albany and David Seifman, Kirsten Danis and Maggie Haberman in N.Y.

Mayor Giuliani disclosed yesterday he is asking the mayoral candidates to make an unprecedented deal with him to "maintain the unity" in the city — apparently by delaying the Jan. 1 inauguration so he can continue serving for a brief period.

A cryptic Giuliani wouldn't provide details, saying he first wanted to talk with each of the remaining three candidates for City Hall.

But sources close to state Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno, who discussed Giuliani's wishes with him yesterday, said Bruno is "open to legislation to extending the mayor's term for perhaps 60 days."

Other sources said Giuliani was hoping for a three-month extension.

"I hope we're going to come up with a position we agree on so that it unifies the city," Giuliani told startled reporters, who've been bracing for days for the mayor's announcement that he would seek to overturn term limits so he could run again.

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D-Manhattan), who also talked with Giuliani, told The Post earlier in the day that the mayor had told him point blank "he wants a third term."

"He's going to ask George [Gov. Pataki], Joe [Bruno] and myself to consider legislation to allow that," Silver said.

Silver, who can block any legislation in the Democrat-controlled Assembly, offered the mayor only a slim hope that would be achieved.

But the already twisted story took another surprise turn, as



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THE one man New York City needs as its leader, now more than ever — Rudolph W. Giuliani — finally is signaling his willingness to serve.

He is in search of a consensus that would allow him to remain in office for an unspecified period.

To ease New York through its current crisis, we say: Go, Rudy, go!

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Giuliani announced late yesterday that he wanted to strike a deal with each of his potential successors, Democrats Mark Green and Fernando Ferrer and Republican Mike Bloomberg, that would "unify" the city.

"I want to do something that unifies this city because I love this place," the mayor declared. "It has nothing to do with me. It has to do with the city."

Giuliani added: "It's going to need politicians

who think outside the box, who think outside the old way in which we used to practice politics. That all came to me last night, that I should start thinking that way also."

Sources said Giuliani had met with Bloomberg and Green. He spoke briefly with Ferrer, who'll face Green in the Oct. 11 runoff, later in the day, and was expected to talk to him again, the sources said.

An agreement by his would-be

successors to let the mayor stay on for some period of time would avert critics' charges that Giuliani, at the height of his popularity following the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, was involved in a power grab.

Sources said Arizona Sen. John McCain, a close Giuliani pal, called City Hall on Tuesday to try to discourage the mayor from pursuing a third term, which would require legislative approval and Justice Department sign-off.

But Giuliani still held out the possibility that he might try to change the term-limits law and run again.

"We might do that. I'm much more hopeful we can work out a unified approach," Giuliani said.

Asked what he'd do if the mayoral candidates refused his offer, Giuliani responded: "I don't know."

While mayoral politics roiled in New York City, there were other major developments related to the trade center attack.

■ A former Osama bin Laden soldier told ABC News that the master terrorist's next plan was to free Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman — convicted of masterminding the 1993 trade center bombing — possibly by kidnapping Americans and offering them in exchange.

■ Stocks retreated as wary investors took profits from Wall Street's first two-day advance since the Sept. 11 attacks. The International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook, which takes the economic pulse of the world twice a year, forecast a growth of 2.6 percent this year — the weakest since 1993. Economists view growth of 2.5 percent as a level indicative of a global recession.

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