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Focus of Candidates' Claims Is on Ability to Unite the City

Following are excerpts from the debate last night between the two Democratic candidates for mayor, Fernando Ferrer and Mark Green, as recorded by The New York Times. The debate, broadcast on NY1 News, was the first of two required by the Campaign Finance Board in the Democratic runoff.

Q. In light of the World Trade Center attack, the idea of two New Yorks no longer seems like an appropriate issue. So how then do you plan to mobilize all New Yorkers to support your plans? . . .

FERRER A terrorist attack on innocent civilians, people working in that building everywhere from heroic firefighters, police officers, construction workers, E.M.S. workers, multimillionaire bond brokers and the immigrant who brings up the coffee and doughnuts in the morning, has to touch us all.

But they all led very real lives. And before that attack, too many of their kids were trapped in underfunded and overcrowded schools. Too many of them found that they couldn't find a decent place to live at a price that they could afford.

But things changed in this respect as well. After that attack we all live in that other New York. We all will be called upon to sacrifice. We all will be called upon to do without. And we can't forget the reasons that impelled us to run for mayor in the first place. They are improving public schools. For me they are afterschool programs. They kept me off the streets. Were it not for a good education, you'd be asking this question of some other guy tonight, not me. They are about decent and affordable housing for people. We may get to those goals more slowly, but we have to reach those goals for all New Yorkers. And that's an inherently unifying message. . . .

GREEN My whole public life for the last 30 years has been guided in the back of my mind by an ethic I learned as a young lawyer: Those less favored in life should be more favored in law. So I've gone out of my way to fight as a consumer commissioner, as now the public advocate, for the very young, the very old, the very discriminated against, to get justice and get their due.

You could talk about there being 200 New Yorks. That's as many ethnicities, races and religions as there are. But before Sept. 11, I was the candidate, I was the Democrat running to unite New York. Figuratively, I said I wanted to be a Brooklyn Bridge linking black, white, Latino, Asian, Jew, Christian, Muslim, straight or gay. We could harp on our differences or we could try to be united as a city.

I wouldn't have harped on a two-city strategy, and I didn't. . . .

Q. . . . I just want to be clear here, Mr. Green, are you saying the message of two New Yorks is divisive?

GREEN I don't have to say it's divisive because I didn't utter it. I talked about hundreds of New Yorks, which is why I've had a town meeting in every neighborhood. Of course we're different, by race, by creed.

Q. But I'm asking you a direct question.

GREEN I'm not going to have — I'm not going to answer whether it's divisive, because I wasn't the one who ran on it. I ran on a campaign of bringing the city together to work together. That, now more than ever, has to be our civic creed.

FERRER You know, when you talk about the problems of affordable housing, inadequate, underfunded and overcrowded public schools, no afterschool programs, my willingness to take a stand against the mayor on proposing that trivial pennies-a-day tax cut that would rob us of our ability to keep 200 middle schools open and give working parents and their kids afterschool programs. One out of four New Yorkers, many of whom work, who don't have health insurance for themselves or their kids, or the problems of the relationship that existed well before Sept. 11 between people and their own Police Department. I don't recall in the last debates, Mark, your ever saying that was divisive. Perhaps now you feel the need to denigrate the things that I'm saying, the issues that I'm raising, but let me just say something. You don't elevate yourself by denigrating that. . . .

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