

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2001

The Next Mayor's Job

New York's next mayor faces one of the most daunting challenges in the city's history — rebuilding after the World Trade Center attack last month. The two remaining Democratic candidates are now telling voters how they would tackle the job. It is important to listen. All campaign promises made before Sept. 11 that involve new spending have become virtually irrelevant. The most important question in this disrupted but crucial mayoral election is who has the skills, depth and fortitude to handle the rebuilding and the enormous budget gap that the attack helped create.

Public Advocate Mark Green and Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer met in their first runoff debate last night, and responded to questions about how they would restore Lower Manhattan and balance the budget. Mr. Ferrer repeated what had originally seemed like an over-hasty promise to use the restoration process to decentralize the financial district's businesses throughout the city. Mr. Ferrer wants to build and rehabilitate office space in places like the Hub in the Bronx and Stapleton in Staten Island to accommodate back-office jobs. That idea might make those boroughs happy, but it seems unlikely to please businesses that located near Wall Street because they wanted the advantages of being at the center of the nation's financial markets, and presumably wanted their support staffs nearby.

Perhaps more important is the danger that Mr. Ferrer's plan would reduce the city's chances of getting needed federal aid. However much New York would benefit from spreading out development and jobs, Washington and the nation believe they are sending aid here to restore the area that was devastated by two hijacked planes. Any sign that the money might be spread throughout the city's political web would be counterproductive.

At this point, Mr. Green's proposals provide a more reasonable focus on restoring the economic vibrancy of Lower Manhattan as a global financial center. He also puts a great deal of emphasis on getting more federal aid. His agenda should be given points for specificity. But Mr. Green also tends to use the idea of billions in additional federal aid to dodge questions about difficult budget choices. Both men have made a good beginning in working out a way to create a quasi-public corporation that would lead the rebuilding process.

While neither candidate has focused directly on how he would manage a newly devastated city

budget, Mr. Ferrer has hewed more closely to his earlier agenda, saying as recently as Tuesday afternoon that "the towers of the World Trade Center have crumbled, but our priorities have not." His construction priorities include projects like the freight rail tunnel to New Jersey and new subway lines, which, while desirable, cannot be tackled until the existing infrastructure is restored.

An example of Mr. Ferrer's refusal to face reality was a moment in last night's debate when he insisted that as mayor he would increase the budget for parks. "Parks are an important part of the quality of living in our city," he said. No one would argue, but leading the public to believe that the parks budget may get bigger in the foreseeable future is borderline irresponsible. The next mayor will inherit a budget gap of at least \$4 billion and probably much more. He will have to struggle to find money for police, firefighters and teachers. Although Mr. Green has been far from eager to deliver any specific bad news, he has been more forthright in saying that many of his old goals would have to be deferred.

The next mayor needs to hit the ground at a full stride on Jan. 1 with a ready-made staff of experts chosen for experience, not political connections. All the candidates need to give voters a better and more detailed idea of whom they will hire and how they will keep the city afloat while rebuilding after the attack. So far, the Democrats' clearest plans involve the role each envisions for Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Mr. Green supports Mr. Giuliani's very bad idea to stay on three months beyond his scheduled departure time. Mr. Ferrer opposes that, but says he would name Mr. Giuliani as head of the Lower Manhattan redevelopment project — a situation Mr. Green says would create, in effect, two mayors at the same time.

Democrats will decide between Mr. Green and Mr. Ferrer in a runoff next Thursday. The winner will face the Republican nominee, Michael Bloomberg, in November. Mr. Bloomberg, a businessman, has so far focused more on a general touting of his own management skills than a specific agenda for rebuilding and balancing the budget. That must change once the runoff is over. At that point, Mayor Giuliani and his team should also be prepared to help out by briefing both nominees, bringing them up to speed in order to maintain continuity no matter who wins.

CITY_21MC100_011830655