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Giuliani ends bid to run for third term

Still hopes to pull off 90-day extension



DOWNTOWN VISIT President Bush with Mayor Giuliani in front of the New York Stock Exchange yesterday. It was the President's second visit to the city since the Sept. 11 attacks.

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After threatening to seek a third term, Mayor Giuliani announced yesterday he will not seek reelection — ending his efforts to repeal the city's term-limits law.

"It's too divisive to be a candidate on the ballot," said Giuliani, who withdrew his name from consideration for the Conservative Party nomination. "It would lead to division and litigation, and the city does not need division and litigation at this time."

Though he ended any chance of a renegade candidacy, the mayor said at a news conference that he still hoped for a 90-day extension of his term to ensure a smooth handoff of power in the midst of the World Trade Center crisis.

"The offer is there. If people want to accept it, they can," he said, adding that he would not actively pursue the issue.

His voice tightening, Giuliani took several barely concealed slaps at Democratic mayoral hopeful Fernando Ferrer, who scoffed at the notion of an extended Giuliani term and said he's ready to take over immediately.

"I think that anybody who thinks they are ready for this job on Jan. 1 — given the monumental tasks that lie ahead — doesn't understand this job," Giuliani said. "There are some people who are so cynical that they really think that I want to hang onto this job."

"We disagree," said Ferrer spokesman John Del Cecato.

The Bronx borough president is ready "to be our next mayor on Jan. 1," Del Cecato said.

Giuliani's stance reflected an inescapable conclusion: He couldn't muster enough votes in the Democrat-controlled Assembly to repeal term limits, which were approved twice by city voters. It also showed that he didn't really want a full term and had raised the issue mainly as leverage to try to get other pols to support the 90-day extension.

Even that effort is in trouble. Most city legislators oppose and extension, and one senior legislator close to Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D-Manhattan) said yesterday that the issue of an extended term was essentially dead.

"Either way, it's too divisive," the lawmaker said.

The extension issue could get

new life if the Democratic mayoral primary is won by Mark Green, who agreed to giving Giuliani an extended stay in office. The Legislature would still have to approve it.

Giuliani said his offer to stay in office was purely for the benefit of the city.

It was to "assure those people who are uncomfortable and nervous and worried that it would be a smooth transition," the mayor said. "It's not political."

"I wish people would take it on the merits," he said. "It has nothing to do with me. It has to do with my concern for the city."

The mayor was spurned by Albany at the moment of his greatest popularity, with polls showing that nine of 10 New Yorkers approved of his management of the Trade Center crisis. But many of those polls showed that voters were reluctant to weaken the term-limits law, which restricts officials to two four-year terms.

The mayor was encouraged by an outpouring of public support — people "begging me to stay and to run for another term," he said. But proposals for an extended term were opposed by good-government groups that said the rule of law would be wounded by tinkering with orderly succession.

Giuliani's flirtation with a candidacy started about a week after the Sept. 11 terrorist attack, when he began making ambiguous statements about whether he should leave office on Dec. 31, as scheduled.

He eventually proposed staying on for three months, until April 1 to steady the transition to the new mayor. But he simultaneously began pushing for a repeal of term limits.

The Conservative Party offered him its ballot line, but Giuliani called party chairman Michael Long yesterday to end those discussions.

Giuliani is giving up any thought of running for another term "because he doesn't want to divide the city," Long said. "Shelley Silver and Fernando Ferrer did a disservice to the people of New York."

CLAIRE SHULMAN

City needs Rudy for a little longer

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