

Pataki Backs Bloomberg as Campaign Struggles for an Edge

By DEAN E. MURPHY
and MICHAEL COOPER

Gov. George E. Pataki endorsed Michael R. Bloomberg for mayor yesterday, giving him a lift at a moment when his campaign seems to be struggling with how best to engage his Democratic opponent, Mark Green.

In an indication of Mr. Bloomberg's recent difficulties, even the news conference announcing the governor's endorsement — by far the most significant yet for the Bloomberg campaign — had some rough edges.

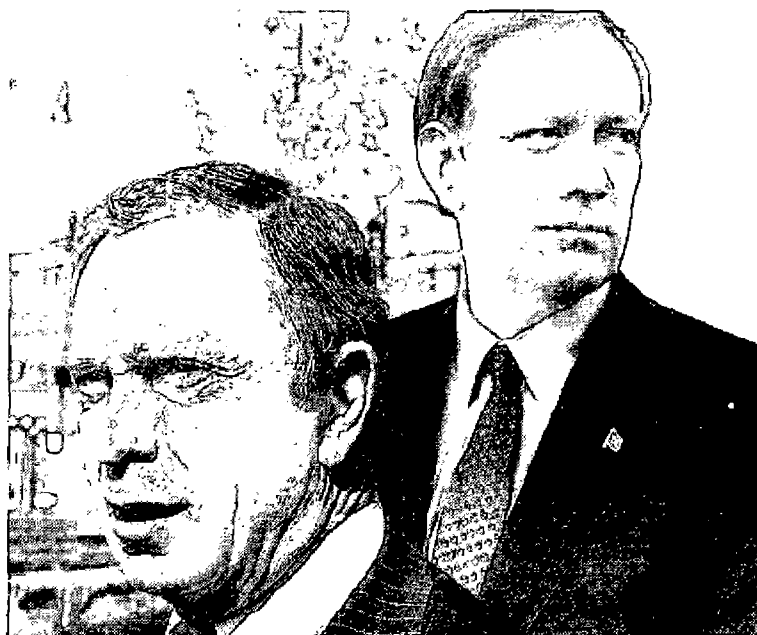
Mr. Bloomberg's staff abruptly ended the session after Mr. Bloomberg became combative: he accused Mr. Green of playing "the racial card" by questioning his company's approach toward South Africa, and then he went on to describe himself as a liberal moments after criticizing Mr. Green for being the same.

"I am a liberal, yes, I think in many senses I am a liberal," Mr. Bloomberg said. "But I am not anti-business and I am not antipolice, and I don't have a record of saying any of these things."

Throughout it all, Mr. Pataki stood at Mr. Bloomberg's side. Then, in an awkward lapse of protocol, Mr. Bloomberg was ushered off to his car while Mr. Pataki lingered and answered a question or two about his trip later in the day to Washington. When it became clear that the governor had remained behind, Mr. Bloomberg was captured on television cameras doing an about-face and hurrying to rejoin him.

In making his endorsement, Mr. Pataki called Mr. Bloomberg a strong leader with vast business experience who as mayor would continue the work of Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani. But perhaps equally noteworthy, the governor did not criticize Mr. Green when given the opportunity to do so during the news conference at Chelsea Waterside Park.

"I am here to support Mike Bloom-



Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Michael R. Bloomberg and Gov. George E. Pataki in Chelsea yesterday.

berg," Mr. Pataki said when asked about Mr. Green. "I am here not to talk about other potential political figures."

The high-profile endorsement was especially important for Mr. Bloomberg. With less than two weeks until the election, he has gained on Mr. Green in opinion polls but still remains significantly behind. A poll released yesterday by Quinnipiac University showed Mr. Green leading Mr. Bloomberg among likely voters by 51 percent to 35 percent, with a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

William Cunningham, a senior adviser to Mr. Bloomberg, questioned the methodology of the Quinnipiac survey and suggested Mr. Green's lead was more likely 12 percent. Another campaign official said Mr. Bloomberg's internal polling put Mr. Green's margin around 10 percent.

Mr. Pataki has long supported Mr. Bloomberg's candidacy, but had not campaigned with him or formally endorsed him until yesterday. Mr. Giuliani has also praised Mr. Bloomberg in the past, but said yesterday that he had not had time to focus on an endorsement in the aftermath of the World Trade Center attack and the anthrax scares.

Mr. Green played down the importance of the Pataki endorsement and refused to be drawn into an exchange over some of the day's comments about him. Mr. Bloomberg not only accused Mr. Green of playing the race card, but also characterized him as antibusiness because of a campaign he led as consumer affairs commissioner to raise city revenues by aggressively enforcing regulations on small businesses.

Mr. Green spoke with reporters in Union Square after being endorsed

by District Council 37, the city's largest municipal union, which previously endorsed Peter F. Vallone in the Democratic primary and Fernando Ferrer in the runoff. He also appeared with the rest of the citywide Democratic ticket: Betsy Gotbaum, the nominee for public advocate, and William C. Thompson Jr., the nominee for city comptroller.

"No matter what my inexperienced competitor wants to say, I'm going to focus on what's good for the working members of District Council 37, for the taxpayers of New York and for all the people of the five boroughs," Mr. Green said. "I'm going to unite the city no matter what rivals or their aides might say."

Mr. Bloomberg was particularly irked yesterday by questions that Mr. Green's staff raised the day before about his big communications company's business with South Africa. Mr. Bloomberg is the founder and majority owner of Bloomberg L.P., which according to Mr. Bloomberg's autobiography, "Bloomberg by Bloomberg," began doing business in South Africa during the presidency of F. W. de Klerk, the country's last white president.

Mr. Green's campaign had criticized Mr. Bloomberg for not waiting until the election of Nelson Mandela, the country's first black president, to enter the South African market. Yesterday, Mr. Bloomberg contradicted the account in his book, saying his company did not begin doing business until after the inauguration of Mr. Mandela in May 1994. A spokeswoman for Bloomberg L.P., Chris Taylor, said the first South African order for a Bloomberg computer terminal was placed on May 24, 1994. She said she could not explain the reference in the book.

"We waited until Mandela was in office," Mr. Bloomberg said. "And this is just a typical racial card. You saw it played before, and here it comes out again."

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