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Bloomberg Puts Eggs In a Basket: Giuliani's

By ADAM NAGOURNEY

Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani's decision to endorse Michael R. Bloomberg at City Hall yesterday provides Mr. Bloomberg with perhaps his greatest hope for victory as he moves into the final days of what his supporters describe as a troubled campaign.

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But the critical question in the days ahead is the extent to which Mr. Giuliani invests his time and prestige in promoting the candidacy of Mr. Bloomberg, the Republican seeking to succeed him. From this perspective, Mr. Giuliani and Mr. Bloomberg would seem to have different needs, which was quite evident when Mr. Giuliani delivered a low-key endorsement of Mr. Bloomberg late yesterday afternoon.

For Mr. Bloomberg, Mr. Giuliani's full-throated support is, according to people inside and outside his campaign, nothing short of critical. Mr. Bloomberg needs Mr. Giuliani to make the case that Mr. Bloomberg is the person best suited to carry on the mayor's legacy, to attack Mark Green, his Democratic opponent, and to present both messages in television advertisements and personal appearances.

That is particularly critical, one Bloomberg aide said, in appealing to white Democrats who supported Mr. Giuliani, but are now backing Mr. Green, to the concern of Mr. Bloomberg's campaign advisers.

"If there is any hope for Mike, it would be Giuliani," said former Mayor Edward I. Koch, a Democrat, who, after endorsing opponents of Mr. Green in the Democratic primary and runoff, said he was staying publicly neutral in this contest.

By contrast, Mr. Giuliani is eager to avoid being perceived as a partisan bickerer at a time when he is so popular, and so identified with the somber task of overseeing the city's recovery from the World Trade Center attack.

The mayor has limited time and appetite for squeezing campaign appearances into a schedule crammed with funerals and news briefings. He is also, an aide said, reluctant to invest much personal political capital in a candidate who Mr. Giuliani's aides say appears unlikely to defeat Mr. Green.

When Mr. Bloomberg showed up at City Hall yesterday, he was accompanied by a vast contingent of aides, and a news release trumpeting his long-awaited endorsement by this popular mayor. He even brought a film crew, accompanied by David Garth, the veteran New York political consultant, to tape the event for a television advertise-

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ment.

But when Mr. Giuliani finally arrived 75 minutes late, by which time a sunny afternoon had turned cold and grey, he was so quiet in offering his endorsement that reporters had to strain to hear him. He repeatedly rejected invitations to attack Mr. Green, who for years has been one of his favorite nemeses.

He made clear that, given his press of obligations, he would not have much time to go out campaigning with Mr. Bloomberg. As Mr. Bloomberg spoke, Mr. Giuliani frequently cast his gaze downward.

Mr. Giuliani's political situation is, in some ways, more complicated than Mr. Bloomberg's. He has been under increasing pressure to erase any impression he has reservations

about Mr. Bloomberg, a result of his delay in announcing his decision. What Mr. Giuliani does from now through Election Day will color his standing with Republican leaders in New York, who have never looked that fondly upon Mr. Giuliani, and whose opinions Mr. Giuliani might want to consider now that he is about to embark on a post-City Hall career.

"If he doesn't endorse him, he'll look like petulant Rudy again," one aide said.

Mr. Giuliani's most famous endorsement was in 1994, when he backed Gov. Mario M. Cuomo, a Democrat, when he ran for re-election against George E. Pataki, then a state senator from Peekskill. At the time, Mr. Giuliani attacked Mr. Pataki with such strident and intense language that Republicans were wary about supporting him during his abbreviated run for the United

States Senate last year against Hillary Rodham Clinton.

For all his obvious reserve of manner, Mr. Giuliani may have gone as far as he had to yesterday, at least in serving his own political needs. He pressed the message that Mr. Bloomberg wanted him to raise: that Mr. Bloomberg was, because of his experience as a business leader, well-suited to lead New York through the years ahead. He stood next to Mr. Bloomberg in front of dozens of cameras and television crews. He said he would gladly make television advertisements.

And while he never took on Mr. Green, to the obvious frustration of Mr. Bloomberg's advisers, who were hoping he would remind voters of Mr. Green's history of battling Mr. Giuliani, it seems unlikely that anyone is about to criticize this mayor at this time for not being partisan

enough.

Whether it was enough to serve Mr. Bloomberg's political needs is another matter. For the past six months, Mr. Bloomberg has sought to present himself as the next Giuliani, praising the mayor at every opportunity, and using his image in television commercials and mailings. In recent days, with polls showing Mr. Bloomberg trailing Mr. Green, even after investing more than \$40 million on his campaign, Mr. Bloomberg's aides have turned an increasingly hopeful eye toward City Hall and Mr. Giuliani.

But Mr. Giuliani stopped short of anointing anyone as his successor yesterday. And his low-voltage endorsement came with fewer than 10 days left to Election Day, at a time when the city is distracted by war and the continuing threat of terrorism, and when many politicians believe voters have made their decision and turned their attention to more urgent matters.

"It's very hard to persuade people 10 days before an election, to suddenly enter and say, 'Follow me, I know best,'" Mr. Koch said. "While he's the only one who can possibly do it, the chances of him being successful are remote."

In truth, the question may be more than whether there is just enough time for Mr. Giuliani to give Mr. Bloomberg the lift his advisers believe he needs. As of yesterday afternoon, when Mr. Giuliani had completed his 15 minutes with Mr. Bloomberg and headed back up the steps of City Hall to hold his daily news briefing on the World Trade Center, it seemed as if the more appropriate question was whether that was something the outgoing mayor was really prepared to do.

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