

DAILY NEWS, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2001

Payback time: Freddy's man gives Mark cool embrace

Dennis Rivera did the expected yesterday, but in a very unexpected way.

Rivera threw the considerable political weight of his union, Local 1199 of the Service Employees International Union, behind Mark Green's race for the mayoralty against Mike Bloomberg — but in the process gave new content to the term "pro forma."

Rivera's union, the city's largest, with 210,000 mostly low-paid minority members, is widely credited with helping Freddy Ferrer come within a whisker of knocking off Green in the Democratic mayoral runoff.

When Rivera backed Ferrer in early September, a large auditorium could barely hold about

700 pumped-up unionists who cheered wildly when Ferrer slipped on the 1199 T-shirt Rivera handed him.

When Rivera backed Green yesterday, there were fewer than 50 obviously bored 1199 members whose tepid applause echoed their leader's pro forma words of endorsement.

And there wasn't even a T-shirt.

Surveying the palpable lack of enthusiasm, a unionist slumped against the small room's back wall recalled Rivera's rally for Ferrer and said, "It's the difference between doing what you

got to do and doing what you want to do. We loved Freddy. Green is kind of the lesser evil. He's the Democrat, and we always go with the Democrat, but no one's running around saying

how wonderful it'd be if Mark's elected like we did when we thought Freddy could win."

Rivera had been one of those most of-

fended by what he charged was a racially divisive Green ad slamming Ferrer in the campaign's last days, and all he would say about that distress yesterday was, "There's no need to rewrite history. [Green and I still] disagree on the ad, but we're look-



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ing to the future."

With the session spiraling downward, Green noted Rivera's glum demeanor and interrupted the media's hunger to see whether they could drive a wedge between him and his newest supporter.

"I have a question," Green said, addressing Rivera. "Are you more or less enthusiastic in your endorsement of me than Rudy Giuliani was [in his endorsement] of Mike Bloomberg [on Saturday]?"

It was a deft ploy. Rivera smiled and the crowd laughed. But the answer — which Rivera didn't offer — is simple: The mayor's embrace of Bloomberg was, in fact, far more enthusiastic than Rivera's of Green.

Does any of this really matter? It could.

The members of 1199 historically vote in droves, and hundreds of its members traditionally volunteer for their favored candidate.

The union has a huge political war chest, which Rivera loves to spend, and the union's political advertising campaigns are among the most sophisticated anywhere.

All that could be extremely helpful to Green if his lead in the polls — about 10 points — shrinks, but it remains to be seen whether Rivera will pull out the stops in a manner even remotely as effective as he did for Ferrer.

Bloomberg, meanwhile, has

moved quickly to make the most of Giuliani's support. In a TV ad titled "In Good Hands" that began blanketing the airwaves yesterday, Giuliani says, "This election matters. . . . This is not a time for a return to politics as usual. . . . I love this city. And I'm confident it will be in good hands with Mike Bloomberg."

Rudy factor uncertain

Like everyone else, Green expected Giuliani to endorse Bloomberg, and he's remained outwardly unruffled. But even in a city where Democrats enjoy a 5-to-1 registration advantage over Republicans, Giuliani's support of Bloomberg is not something to be taken lightly.

So beginning today, Green's upbeat, positive TV commer-

cials will have company: the Democrat's first direct paid media attack on Bloomberg. Titled "Wrong for our Kids," the spot slams Bloomberg for supposedly wanting to "get computers out of the classroom" and for wanting to "take taxpayer money away from public schools [for] unaccountable private schools."

"I'm a patient person," Green said yesterday. But after "six negative [Bloomberg] ads, I felt that if he won't tell the truth about me, I'll tell the truth about him."

Okay, this is something with which everyone is familiar. In its last week, this most vital of all recent mayoral campaigns will be fought off the curb.

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