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Mayor's Race Resumes, Amid Talk of Further Delay

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The campaign for mayor commenced again yesterday amid concern about whether the Board of Elections could effectively administer the vote on Tuesday, with some of the Democratic mayoral campaigns saying that Gov. George E. Pataki had asked them whether he should postpone the primary again.

On a day when one of the candidates began publicly campaigning for the first time since the World Trade Center attack — Mark Green called a news conference at his Midtown law office to describe what he would do as mayor to rebuild New York — Mr. Pataki raised the possibility of postponing the election in telephone conversations with at least two of the mayoral candidates, campaign aides said.

The candidates strongly argued against postponing the primary in their conversations with the Republican governor, according to the aides, saying it was unnecessary and would disrupt the Democratic process and citing such historical examples as the election that took place in 1864, during the Civil War.

One of the candidates, Peter F. Vallone, the City Council speaker, told Mr. Pataki that he should not let "terrorists dictate our elections," an aide to Mr. Vallone said. Advisers to Mr. Green last night questioned whether Mr. Pataki had the statutory authority to do that. A spokesman for a third candidate, Fernando Ferrer, said Mr. Pataki had called him as well, but would not provide any details of their conversation.

Mr. Pataki did not return calls seeking comment, and his office declined to discuss the reports.

Mr. Pataki's actions stirred concern among the Democrats and their aides, who were already worried about increasing evidence of public interest among New York voters trying to accomplish the improbable task of overturning term-limit laws to allow Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani to stay in office.

Candidates speak out against the possibility of postponing the primary again.

The obstacles to this happening are large. Election lawyers said the Assembly, controlled by Democrats, would have to pass it, and its leader, Sheldon Silver, has said he opposes it. Still, one Democrat questioned whether Mr. Silver would be able to hold back a possibly growing sentiment in a situation in which Mr. Pataki, citing the crisis in New York City and the overwhelming popularity of Mr. Giuliani, could argue for delaying the election for one year.

Repealing term limits might require not only the support of the Legislature and the governor, but also a home-rule message by the Council, the lawyers said. The Council, with Mr. Vallone at its head, is unlikely to provide that kind of message, though some Council aides acknowledged that the Legislature could probably find a way around it.

In the midst of these events, one roadblock to an election next Tuesday fell: in Brooklyn, Judge I. Leo Glasser dismissed a lawsuit brought by a group of City Council candidates and voters seeking to postpone the primary. The lawsuit hinged, in part, on the contention that residents in minority neighborhoods had not been properly informed of the rescheduled primary and that those living south of Canal Street had not been sufficiently informed of changes in the voting.

Douglas A. Kellner, an elections commissioner from Manhattan, acknowledged at the hearing that the turmoil at the Board of Elections — its offices are less than two blocks from the World Trade Center — would complicate efforts to count the vote, and could result in a delay in the reporting.

But in the highest-profile races, for mayor and public advocate, elections inspectors have been asked to call in results to a toll-free number, so the numbers might be available much earlier.

The planning for next Tuesday came on a day Mr. Green, the public advocate, proposed the creation of a state-city public authority to oversee the reconstruction effort. But what Mr. Green was saying was arguably less important than the fact

Continued on Page A28

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NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

Mayor's Race Resumes Amid Talk of More Delay

Continued From Page A20

that he was speaking at all. When he stepped to the lectern, it marked the first time that any of the six major political candidates had held any public event since the terrorist attack.

Their candidates' relative silence to date reflects the peculiar position they find themselves in as they approach the primary. They are barred by the Campaign Finance Board from spending any more money on anything but getting out the vote, and limited by the atmosphere of the times in the extent to which they can do anything that might seem political.

This forced silence has become more problematic for the candidates as the primary has grown closer, particularly given the speculation about Mr. Giuliani.

"It is a unique quandary," Mr. Green said, standing not in his campaign headquarters but on the decidedly less political ground of a reception area of the law firm. "You don't want to say anything explicitly political — nor have I. But at the same time, I have a special obligation to say where I think the city could be headed next year in order to rebound, regroup and rebuild."

"Independent of me, there will be a primary election in five days, a general election in six weeks," he said. "If there were elections during the Civil War, during the Second World War, right after the Cuban missile crisis, it is a testimony to the strength of this country that elections go on — even during crises."

Mr. Green's appearance signaled a turn in this strange contest, as this invisible campaign becomes more visible. Tomorrow, The New York Times and NY1 News are sponsoring a one-hour Democratic mayoral candidate forum on how the candidates would lead New York out of this crisis. (The time of the forum, and when it will be televised, had not been decided last night.)

Mr. Green; Comptroller Alan G. Hevesi; and Mr. Ferrer, the Bronx borough president, said yesterday that they would appear at the forum. Mr. Vallone, who has been a regular figure at Mr. Giuliani's side over the course of a dozen news conferences, declined yesterday to participate. "It's our position that it is not helpful to have a debate among the candidates," said an aide to Mr. Vallone.

Debate organizers said the event would go on without him.

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