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THE NEW YORK TIMES, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2001

Rousing the Voters

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Gov. George Pataki have shown their mettle since Sept. 11 in dealing bravely and expertly with the aftermath of the terrorist attack on New York City. Now their voices are needed to rally voters to the polls next Tuesday for the primary elections that were to have taken place on the day of the World Trade Center disaster.

In Tuesday's primaries city voters will be choosing nominees for all important local offices, including mayor and City Council. But too many people are hardly aware that the election is happening. Others may feel that participation is unimportant at a time of international crisis. New Yorkers have become used to looking to Mr. Giuliani and Mr. Pataki for leadership over the past days. If the governor and mayor call on all citizens to participate in this most basic of American freedoms the turnout could swell, if not to patriotic heights at least to something closer to normal.

Governor Pataki, who had been considering postponing the elections once again, made the right choice yesterday when he affirmed that they would take place according to plan. But he created more confusion when he suggested that voters write in Mr. Giuliani's name for mayor. Mr. Giuliani is internationally popular right now. But given the technical difficulties of casting and counting write-in ballots, and the fact that the mayor is not eligible to serve again because of term limits, Mr. Pataki was all but inviting people to invalidate their votes.

Mr. Giuliani, whose performance has been so inspiring over these recent days, needs to spend his last months in office concentrating on the tasks of rebuilding New York and consoling its citizens. He should not be distracted by legal and political arguments over the November ballot.

New York City's Board of Elections has been working around the clock to set up sites, find poll workers and prepare for a new primary on Tuesday. And officials believe it could go more smoothly than they feared a few days ago. Governor Pataki has promised to help by making certain each polling place has a security officer in attendance.

The fall elections were not causing much excitement in New York to begin with, but certainly the events of the past days have shown how important it is to use care in selecting the next generation of city leaders. By voting on Tuesday New Yorkers can show that they are determined to follow Mr. Giuliani's advice and "go about in a normal way." The mayor and governor should cheer them on. But at bottom, voting is the responsibility of New Yorkers themselves.

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TOP COP Attorney General John Ashcroft (c.) speaks at Ground Zero flanked by Mayor Giuliani, Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik and Gov. Pataki.

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