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Team Rudy rebuffed in bid to stay

By ROBERT HARDT Jr., MAGGIE HABERMAN, DAVID SEIFMAN, and FREDRIC U DICKER

The Giuliani administration has been secretly lobbying City Co ncil members about ending term limits — but Gov. Pataki yesterday erased any doubts about the elections and said that Tuesday's primaries will go on.

"The mayor has been a great mayor and I'll tell you if I were a resident of New York City, I'd write him in," Pataki said.

"But the primary will go forward, the election will go forward," Pataki added.

On Thursday, Pataki had quietly contacted the four Democratic mayoral candidates to see how they felt about possibly postponing the primary — and the governor was told they would all oppose that.

Meanwhile, The Post has learned that several council leaders were contacted by Deputy Mayor Joseph Lhota's office on Thursday to ask if they would be interested in repealing the term-limits law — in an effort to postpone the elections and keep the mayor in office.

The council members — who asked not to be identified — confirmed that Lhota or a staffer in his office contacted them and asked whether they would support amending the term-limits law.

Giuliani has publicly ducked questions about whether he wants to continue in office.

"I don't feel like talking about politics," he said yesterday.

City Council Speaker Peter Vallone, who is running for mayor, only learned this morning of the mayor team's efforts to ditch limits, sources said.

Pataki's and Giuliani's behind-the-scenes diplomacy was frustrated by the fact that changing the primary date was opposed by prominent Democrats, including state Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D-Manhattan). Silver said he told Pataki it "would not be appropriate" to push back the primary.

Pataki's main concern was that there wouldn't be enough cops to man the 1,280 sites from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., Silver said.

"I said we could find people to replace the police at the polls, the National Guard or whatever," Silver said.

The Republican-controlled state Senate has been "inundated" during the past few days with requests to delay the primary and take steps to keep Giuliani in office, according to spokesman John McArdle.

"Our counsel's office was flooded with requests from people who wanted to keep Rudy in," said McArdle.

"By law, he can't serve a third consecutive term," said board spokeswoman Naomi Bernstein.

Also yesterday, mayoral candidate Michael Bloomberg toured ground zero with Rudy, Arizona Sen. John McCain, and Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert.



STILL RUNNING: Peter Vallone, addressing the City Council yesterday, will still be in the primary despite feelers by Giuliani aides to repeal term limits and extend the mayor's term. N.Y. Post: Joey Newfield

All's set for vote in Tues. primary

By ROBERT HARDT Jr.

Board of Election officials yesterday insisted Tuesday's rescheduled primary will go off as planned — and voting machines are already being carted back to more than 1,000 polling sites across the city.

"It hasn't been easy, but we're getting ready to put our troops out there," said board spokeswoman Naomi Bernstein.

Some voters in lower Manhattan — which was devastated by last week's World Trade Center terror attack — will have the option of voting on paper ballots at 200 Varick St.

The board also has set up new polling places in Surrogate's Court on Chambers Street and 45 Wall St. to replace several shuttered sites.

"The number of voters who will be directly affected by this disaster will be as minimal as possible," Bernstein said.

Trying to help increase voter awareness of the Sept. 25 primary date, a bipartisan coalition of civic groups has started a massive print campaign to help get out the vote.

Although the board won't be providing preliminary election results as it has in past years, The Associated Press will be compiling results late Tuesday night.

Extensive exit polling will be conducted for the first time in a primary race for a consortium of media outlets, including The Post.

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