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'I'd Write Him In'

Comment may muddle mayoral race

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Gov. George Pataki yesterday urged New Yorkers to vote in Tuesday's primary, quelling rumors that he would delay the election and allow Mayor Rudolph Giuliani to to continue shepherding the city through its crisis.

Yet Pataki made a comment that could throw another monkey wrench into an already complicated vote count, suggesting that people write in Giuliani.

"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.

While Pataki clearly intended the comment as an expression of praise for the mayor, some voters will no doubt seize the idea and write Giuliani's name on Tuesday's ballot.

The mayor seemed taken aback by Pataki's comment, stammering as he told reporters, "I don't think I'm gonna . . . I don't feel like talking about politics." Pressed again to respond, Giuliani said, "It seems like very, very far from things that I should be concentrating on right now."



Gov. George Pataki and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani are applauded while shaking hands during President Bush's address before a joint session of Congress Thursday night.

AP Photo

Republicans or Democrats could write in Giuliani, with Republicans using Slot 3 and Democrats using Slot 4 on the voting machines. If enough Republicans do so, it could force a runoff in the Republican mayoral campaign, said Douglas Kellner, the Manhattan Democraton the Board of Elections.

Despite the fact that he is term-limited, it would even be legally possible for Giuliani to end up in a runoff, Kellner said. "It would be up to someone to challenge him in court."

A "Write in Rudy" campaign could also cause voting machine breakdowns on Tuesday and make the vote count more difficult, elections officials said.

"It will have marginal impact on the number of machine breakdowns because there will be some percentage of voters who try to do this who will manage to jam the machines," Kellner said. "I don't thing it's significant or troublesome, but . . . counting write-in ballots is much slower than counting paper ballots, which is, in turn, slower than counting the machine votes."

Even before the World Trade Center attack, officials had been worried that the crowded ballot and 37 open City Council seats would lead to close outcomes and protracted vote counts. A special procedure had been established to expedite the count in the mayoral and public advocate races, where runoffs are possible.

Rumors had circulated for several days that Pataki was considering another delay in the election, partially because the Board of Elections' offices on lower Broadway were temporarily without power, telephone or computer service.

Pataki appeared at Pier 92 yesterday to urge voters to exercise their constitutional rights.

"As I said numerous times, this wasn't just an attack on the two towers, it was an attack on our freedoms," the governor said. "And one of these important freedoms is our right to freely choose our elected representatives who lead us.

"The primary will go on," he said.

Giuliani said Tuesday's election will stretch already overtaxed city services. National Guard or State Police troops might be called to fill in for the 2,500 police who will be diverted to poll sites.

"It is doable, but it will be a strain," the mayor said.

Elections board members seemed more optimistic that the election will go smoothly. "I think the governor is confident that we'll be able to pull this off," said attorney Frederic Umane, the board's Manhattan Republican member.

And the board's Queens Republican, Stephen Weiner, predicted a relatively smooth election, but with isolated problems because poll workers haven't been mailed notices to show up.

There was one last minute glitch yesterday, forcing officials to relocate polling places for 24 elections districts in Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side.

That decision came after the Board of Education decided that three schools could no longer be used as polling sites because they were overcrowded by students relocated from the disaster area.

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