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Candidates Focus on Healing City

Political agendas take a back seat

By Dan Janison
STAFF WRITER

Shelving some of their earlier and more expensive campaign proposals, the six main mayoral candidates remolded their messages yesterday toward the security and fiscal crises spawned by the Twin Towers massacre.

They promoted themselves for tomorrow's unprecedented primary rerun, mixing their clashing policies with words of respect for the victims and heroes of the World Trade Center attack.

All of the candidates urged, in the name of democracy, that city residents vote in the primary, which was postponed from Sept. 11.

Without attacking each other, they displayed some differences. For example, Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer said the terrorist attack could force higher taxes, yet Republican media mogul Michael Bloomberg called a tax hike "not conceivable."

Council Speaker Peter Vallone said he'd want to keep Mayor Rudolph Giuliani "in place" in the "management team" overseeing the crisis. Public Advocate Mark Green, asked on WCBS-TV if Giuliani weren't casting a huge shadow on the race, said, "We have one mayor at a time . . . We [as a city] are bigger than any public official."

Comptroller Alan Hevesi outlined proposals for new government agencies to help rebuild, predicting business will be less highly concentrated in lower Manhattan "no matter what." The Queens Democrat, supported by the teachers and firefighters unions, said first-year pay raises for city employees may have to be smaller than hoped.

Herman Badillo, battling Bloomberg in the GOP primary, assailed those who had criticized the city's uniformed workers in the days before their heroism in the attack won them widespread acclaim.

All the candidates warned of new city security measures but varied over details.

Some earlier proposals were put on the back burner. Ferrer said progress on schools, housing and other goals will undoubtedly have to occur more slowly.

Vallone, who had pledged to prevent all parks budget cuts and proposed a massive senior-citizen prescription-drug aid plan, acknowledged that priorities must shift. And Green said, "If I have to defer other goals . . . I will," given the importance of security and rebuilding.

The Democratic ballot, the most crowded in a generation because of a term-limits law that ousts incumbents at year-end, features a four-way race for mayor, a seven-way public-advocate campaign, a choice of two for comptroller, and crowded campaigns for council and four borough-president seats. Republicans have a choice of two candidates for mayor.

Also, during pre-taped messages on WNBC-TV and interviews on WABC-TV and WCBS-TV:

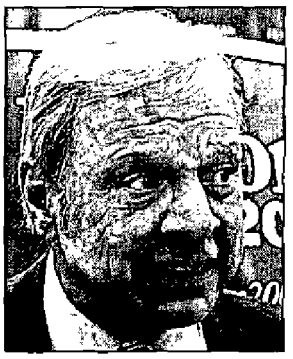
- Hevesi said he would consider tapping Giuliani, who leaves office Dec. 31, to head a rebuilding program. He urged resistance to bigotry, especially now against Muslims. He called for a broad tax-break program and relief to sustain tourism and entertainment.
- Green said he hopes he can apply the city's current spirit of unity to "the broader purposes of New York." He said a tax hike shouldn't be needed if federal and state aid is sufficient.
- Ferrer spoke of redeploying police to beef up anti-terrorist efforts.
- Vallone said he wants to keep the current crisis-management team in place without "forfeiting my right to be mayor."
- Bloomberg welcomed wider use of camera surveillance for security. He said he has dealt with "security issues and changing economic times" in business and that Giuliani's good emergency response stemmed from eight years of experience.

WHAT THE HOPEFULS ARE SAYING



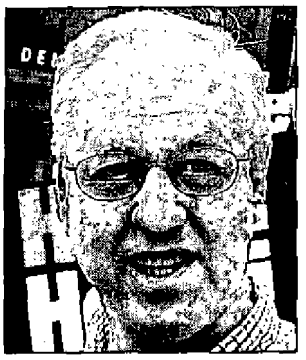
'We've never been more united because of an external act. I hope to continue that unity and apply it to the broader purposes of New York.'

— Mark Green



'This was an attack on everything we stand for . . . . It's a day that will go down in infamy like Dec. 7 did.'

— Peter Vallone



'I have a deep love for the city . . . and an extraordinary appreciation for our ethnic diversity, and a greater appreciation than ever before for our strength and our unity.'

— Alan Hevesi



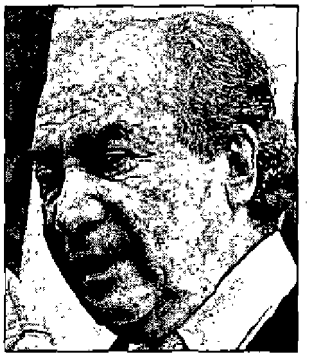
'In a crisis, especially, I become calmer, cooler and more focused on the issues, never forgetting who I am or why I'm there in the first place.'

— Fernando Ferrer



'What are we voting for? For the person to lead the most wonderful, generous, caring city in the world.'

— Michael Bloomberg



'We have to move ahead to show everybody that we are in fact the capital of the world.'

— Herman Badillo

George Spitz, who is also a candidate, was not on television yesterday.

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