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Mood subdued as NYC holds mayoral primary

By Charisse Jones
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NEW YORK — Two weeks from the day of the destruction of the World Trade Center, New Yorkers headed to the polls Tuesday for a mayoral primary tinged by sadness, defiance and the belief by some that the right candidate is not on the ballot.

Attendance was sparse at polling sites, where voters were to decide who among four Democrats and two Republicans should face off in a Nov. 6 final election.

New York City

The election was scheduled for Sept. 11, the day two hijacked jets were crashed into the city's tallest skyscrapers. The terrorist act prompted Gov. George Pataki to postpone the election to Tuesday. Thousands of victims remain buried beneath a pile of steel and concrete.

The candidates were reluctant to resume campaigning in the days after the attacks and were overshadowed by Mayor Rudy Giuliani. Giuliani's handling of the disaster has been widely praised and prompted calls for his re-election despite a term-limits law that bars him from running for a third consecutive 4-year term.

The mayor hinted he might try to stay in office. But such a campaign appeared a longshot, and lawmakers have said they are reluctant to override a law that passed two referendums. Both the City Council and the state Legislature would have to approve changing the city charter.

At the polls, some said they felt it was their duty to get out and vote.

"I just wanted to be involved in this day," said Milton Wilson, 55, who volunteered at a polling place on the Upper East Side. "It motivated me because I believe in democracy and I believe nothing should deter me from voting," Wilson said.

He applauded Giuliani's leadership during the city's crisis, but he said the term-limits law should stay in place. "I don't think we should change all the laws because that would be radical to our system."

Others who did not support Giuliani said he should nevertheless stick around. "I can't stand the man," said James Marshall, 37. However, "at least leave him here for a year. Give the city time to calm down."

Lorraine Fittipaldi, a Republican, wrote in Giuliani's name. "Even if they keep him for a year, I think he's been wonderful."

Tamara Stack disagreed with some of the mayor's positions, but she said she may support him if he finds a way to run. "I really like the way he's handling this crisis."

Those seeking to replace Giuliani are among the city's most powerful politicians. The Democratic primary included Fernando Ferrer, the Bronx borough president; Mark Green, the city's public advocate; Alan Hevesi, the city comptroller; and Peter Vallone, speaker of the City Council. On the Republican side, billionaire businessman Michael Bloomberg faced Herman Badillo, a former congressman.

Election officials said the final votes might not be tallied until next week. If no candidate gets at least 40% of the vote in a primary, the top two vote-getters will compete in a runoff Oct. 11.

Early exit polling found that a majority of Republicans and four in 10 Democrats would vote for Giuliani in the November general election if he could run. "The last thing the city needs is a change in government," said Fran Kane, a Democrat.

Contributing: The Associated Press

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