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The debate over future of Giuliani is now in Albany's hands

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ANALYSIS

By refusing to go along with Mayor Giuliani's request for a three-month extension to his term, Fernando Ferrer yesterday kicked the debate upstairs — to Albany and, more specifically, to Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver.

In the absence of a voluntary pact among all three candidates, only Silver can now break the political logjam by pushing through legislation to grant Giuliani the 90 extra days he seeks.

In this, the Manhattan Democrat can likely count on the support of mayoral hopefuls Mark Green and Michael Bloomberg, both of whom agreed to the extension yesterday, as well as Gov. Pataki, Giuliani and every other Republican in the land.

But Silver will likely face stiff opposition from elsewhere, certainly from Ferrer, and just as likely from the Assembly's Black and Latino Caucus, an important part of Silver's legislative base.

No popularity contest

Assemblyman Denny Farrell (D-Manhattan), chairman of the powerful Ways and Means Committee and a caucus member, signaled as much earlier this week when he came out "very strongly in favor of not doing anything" when it came to Giuliani, as he told the Daily News.

"We don't pick elected officials based on public opinion," Farrell said. "If we did, we would have reelected Bill Clinton as President because he had a 67% approval rating at the end of his term."

So Ferrer is apparently willing to gamble on Silver, or else he wouldn't have nixed that rarest of things — an honest compromise between usually warring politicians, all done in the name of the public good at a time of extraordinary challenge.

Which is not to say that campaign politics played no role in the near-deal — or in how the situation will now play out.

For Green and Bloomberg, the political calculus was clear: If you can't beat Rudy, join Rudy.

Anything else could be viewed as selfishness — if not downright treason — as Giuliani attempts to steer the city through the ruins of the vaporized World Trade Center.

What's so confounding to many is that Ferrer would seem to have the most to win by signing on. Consider that the central challenge to his campaign is drawing more white voters, only 7% of whom voted for him in Tuesday's primary.

As one veteran campaign operative noted yesterday, "By not going for this deal, Freddy is basically sticking his thumb in the eye of the most popular white politician in America.

"I mean, why do you think Mark went for the deal? This makes him look reasonable and accommodating in the city's hour of need."

Still a mystery

If nothing else, agreeing to the voluntary extension would have ended the will-he-or-won't-he sideshow that Giuliani's future has become. Now, instead of talking about issues, the talk will likely be about what Rudy will do next and whether Silver will budge. How that is good for Ferrer is a mystery.

And the mayor still has some cards to play. The Conservative Party line is his for the asking, and aides believe Giuliani is committed to taking it if he can't make a deal for an extension. Thus, even if Silver does nothing, Giuliani's name can still appear on the ballot in November. Some of the mayor's advisers have even speculated that he could get 60% to 65% of the vote if he chose to take his battle all the way to Election Day.

So where would that leave New York? With an outgoing but popularly elected mayor, unable to serve any further because of term limits. And the city jittery and divided. Hardly the ideal way for a new mayor to take office.

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