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IN STATESMAN MODE, RUDY STAYING ALOOF AS BLOOMBERG WAITS

Pataki Endorses Him, But G.O.P. Candidate Searches for Giuliani

CAMPAIGNING 'WOULDN'T BE SEEMLY'

Billionaire Pours Money Into Party, But Republicans Keep Distance

BY ANDREA BERNSTEIN

Thirteen days before arguably one of the most contentious and important Mayoral elections in the city's history, Governor George Pataki is expected to endorse Michael Bloomberg today, Oct. 24, finally putting the state party's stamp of approval on its candidate.

There likely will be stirring words of support and warm encouragement from the titular head of the state party. But what will be most noticeable is what's missing: Rudy Giuliani. Other leaders of the state party. And the kind of early and enthusiastic party support that can make or break a candidate.

Mr. Bloomberg appears to be racing



MICHAEL BLOOMBERG

toward the Mayoral election as the same aloof and independent candidate he was when he started—without party friends, liberated from party funds and free of the ideology that could drive endorsements and bring voters to the polls.

In the last few months, Mr. Bloomberg has tried to buy some of that support, making several hundred thousand dollars in contributions to state Republican Party committees, campaign records show. But those dollars apparently couldn't offset the thousands he's given in the past to Democratic candidates and their party, leaving Republican leaders deeply suspicious and

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Rudy Snubs Bloomberg

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slow to pitch in.

Part of the problem is that few Republicans think Mr. Bloomberg can win, and few think he's worth spending political capital on.

"Ugh!" was one Republican strategist's reaction when asked about the Bloomberg campaign.

"He doesn't have a chance in the world," another said.

"Mark Green will end up running a horrible campaign and getting elected anyway," said a third.

"We're calling [the Bloomberg campaign] the 'Hindenberg campaign,'" said a fourth strategist. "He's a man with a lot of dollars and no sense."

Part of the lack of support has to do with hidden agendas—like the widely felt suspicion that Mr. Giuliani would rather run against a Mark Green in 2005 than a Mike Bloomberg.

Bloomberg aides publicly shrug off Mayor Giuliani's apparent indifference.

"Everything is in the timing," insisted William Cunningham, Mr. Bloomberg's spokesman. "There is always a plan."

Privately, however, supporters are jittery. "We need," said one, "not just an endorsement from Mayor Giuliani. We need him to put his arms around us, and we're not sure he will."

Having Mr. Pataki's endorsement at last is no small thing. The Governor is widely popular since the Sept. 11 attack, seen by many voters as a stalwart leader who has done the city and state proud.

But the real star since Sept. 11, as Mr. Pataki knows too well, is Mr. Giuliani. His endorsement of Mr. Bloomberg, political analysts believe, could go a long way toward erasing questions about whether the businessman is fit for the second-toughest job in the United States.

Both the Governor's office and the Mayor's office swat away queries about the Bloomberg campaign.

"We've been a little focused right now on some of the issues facing the city and state," said Mike McKeon, Mr. Pataki's spokesman. Will Mr. Pataki be out stumping for Mr. Bloomberg? "They recognize we have serious work to get done, so they've been judicious in their requests," Mr. McKeon answered. There may be some last-minute commercials or phone calls, even some joint appearances, but nothing too extensive appears to be planned.

As for the Mayor: "The Mayor has been pretty busy lately," noted Adam Goodman, a strategist for Mr. Giuliani's campaigns. "The most important act of political leadership right now is the public leadership of renewing New York. That's why both the Governor and the Mayor have been somewhat absent from the Bloomberg campaign, as they should be."

But resistance to Mr. Bloomberg runs deep in the Republican Party. And, ironically, it's based on the same issue that seems to be troubling many registered Democrats, who have to come out in droves—as they did for Mr. Giuliani—to get a Republican elected in a citywide race in this Democratic town.

Many said that Mr. Bloomberg may be a registered Republican since he decided to run for Mayor, but that's as far as the affiliation goes. The proof, they say, is in the numbers.

Mr. Bloomberg's campaign has given at least $190,000 to New York Republican Party committees this year. On Nov. 1 and 2, 2000—less than a month after switching his registration to Republican—Mr. Bloomberg also gave $75,000 to committees promoting Republican candidates for the State Assembly and the State Senate.

Yet before his decision to switch parties and run for Mayor, Mr. Bloomberg gave $87,000 to Democratic candidates, parties and P.A.C.'s since 1997, but only $18,000 to Republicans, federal records show. Most went to party committees, but Senator John McCain, the party's rebel, was the candidate who got the biggest gift—$3,000.

Mr. McCain has repaid the favor, making

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two trips to campaign with Mr. Bloomberg, and was, until Mr. Pataki, the most notable Republican to step up.

As for the most prominent Republican of all, President George W. Bush: At one time, Bloomberg supporters hoped for a visit, but with a war and an ongoing terrorist threat, they're not expecting much. Mr. Bush, in fact, was here and did meet with Mr. Bloomberg, but behind closed doors, without even a photo opportunity—good political strategy for Mr. Bush, who is emphasizing leadership over politics, but not for Mr. Bloomberg.

And surely that is part of Mayor Giuliani's assistance to the Bloomberg campaign.

"It wouldn't be seemly," said one Giuliani supporter. "For a Mayor to get heavily involved in politics right now would bring him down to earth, and remind people of things they don't like about him. He doesn't need that right now."

As for the rest of the state party structure, Mr. Bloomberg's relationship with the G.O.P. was a shotgun marriage at the start and remains one today.

"He was the best they could do," said Norman Adler, a consultant who works for both Republicans and Democrats.

"I still don't know why he chose to run as a Republican, since he is in fact a liberal Democrat," said Republican consultant Roger Stone.



RICHARD B. LEVINE

Oh, what a couple they'd make! Mayor Rudy Giuliani and Republican Mayoral candidate Michael Bloomberg at the Hispanic Columbus Day Parade on Oct. 14.

"He is not a real Republican," concurred Mike Murphy, a strategist for defeated U.S. Senate candidate Rick Lazio and Mr. McCain who also works for conservative causes. "But Mark Green is a real socialist, so most Republicans say, 'Oh, what the hell.'"

Mr. Bloomberg hasn't helped matters by hiring a bevy of Democratic consultants, including Penn, Schoen, Berland, who were pollsters for Bill and Hillary Clinton and now work for Andrew Cuomo. Mr. Bloomberg's media firm is Squier, Knapp, Dunn, who worked for Al Gore and, before that, Bill Clinton. "People just roll their eyes," said a Washington Republican. "He has shunned the Republican Party."

Even Democrats doubt his sincerity.

"I know he was a very good Democrat," Congressman Charles Rangel said at a joint press conference called to provoke Mark Green, who at the time was under fire for his last-minute campaign tactics before the Oct. 11 runoff election against Fernando Ferrer. "And I don't know how much of that Republican water he has really drunk."

Mr. Bloomberg stood by and smiled.

But perhaps Mr. Bloomberg's biggest hurdle is indifference.

At a recent joint press conference between Mr. Bloomberg and Dennis Rivera, the powerful president of the health-care worker's union, one reporter was convinced that Mr. Pataki had been pressuring Mr. Rivera to get behind Mr. Bloomberg. Mr. Rivera, however, insisted that wasn't so.

"The last time I spoke to Governor Pataki about the Mayor's race," Mr. Rivera said, "was about March. And then I told him I thought Alan Hevesi would win."

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