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RUDY: GOV'S MY MAN

Won't run unless George bows out

By DAVID SEIFMAN
and FREDRIC U. DICKER

Mayor Giuliani flatly ruled out running against Gov. Pataki in the Republican primary next year, but he left open the possibility he'll run for governor if Pataki does not.

"I have a very important announcement to make," Giuliani declared with a hint of drama at an afternoon press conference.

"You ready? I support George Pataki for governor," Giuliani continued, knocking down a whirlwind of speculation that he might challenge the governor — his off-again, on-again political nemesis — in the GOP primary next year.

Giuliani said he had privately told Pataki before the Sept. 11 World Trade Center attack that he would back the governor for re-election, and feels even more strongly about that commitment now.

"The reality is he's been a terrific leader during this crisis," Giuliani said of Pataki.

"I had already told him before this happened I was going to support him for governor and it seems to me he's even more entitled to re-election right now.

"There's no reason to run against somebody if you think he's been doing a fine job. The opposite of that.

"Then you support them, you help them, you try to get them re-elected," Giuliani continued.

The mayor's comments were sparked by Post columnist Neal Travis' report yesterday that a City Hall staffer said the mayor might challenge the governor in the primary.

The staffer said Pataki's support for a sweeping new plan to put gambling casinos in the Catskills — but not in New York City — "could be Pataki's Little Big Horn," damaging him politically.

The Associated Press, meanwhile, reported that a close aide to Giuliani said the mayor may run for governor if Pataki defies expectations and decides not to run.

Giuliani refused to say what he would do if Pataki doesn't run, leaving open the possibility that he would seek the state's highest elected post.

"Hypothetical questions I never answer," said the mayor.

"I learned that in court. You ask a hypothetical question, then the other guy jumps up and says, 'Objection.' And the judge says, 'sustained.'"

Meanwhile, a mayoral aide said the AP story resulted from an unauthorized leak by someone who "had his gonads taken out this morning."

Pataki, who has repeatedly said he expects to seek re-election, will face either state Comptroller Carl McCall or former federal housing Secretary Andrew Cuomo, who are battling for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination.

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THAT'S ONE VALUABLE DIAMOND! Mayor Giuliani reacts in mock surprise yesterday after hearing projections that World Series games will generate at least $100 million for the city. AP

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