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This Pair Not Afraid to Fight

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When Republican Michael Bloomberg and Democrat Mark Green faced off yesterday, they understood each other perfectly.

They didn't tiptoe around or pretend that they were actually friends with a slight difference of opinion. Six days before the election, and with another debate in the offing tomorrow, both looked entirely comfortable with a verbal smackdown.

ANALYSIS

Perhaps it's because both have similar backgrounds as white, well-educated Jewish men with graduate degrees from Harvard — Bloomberg from the business school, Green from the law school. Perhaps it's because they come from the same generation; Bloomberg is 59 and Green is 56.

But it was likely more than that.

Both men enjoy sharing their opinions, trust their own judgment and are used to being the smartest, or hardest-working kids in their class. Both are comfortable with arguing and winning arguments, convinced that they have the right answer. Both have an element of self-righteous crusader about them and, certainly, neither man suffers a lack of self-confidence.

Not incidentally, they took similar paths to get to the election finals, defeating prominent Puerto Rican politicians who grew up in tough neighborhoods in the Bronx.

Until yesterday's debate, Bloomberg often stumbled with off-the-cuff remarks that diluted his message that New York needs a businessman to salve its economic wounds. In the debate, the Republican held his own against the more experienced Democrat.

For once, Bloomberg offered a cogent and focused presentation as to why he should be mayor.

"Honesty, realism, management, accountability," he said at one point.

"Education, education, education," he said at another.

The billionaire wanted particularly to show himself as a doer with no tolerance for delays

"Plain and simple," Bloomberg said. "I'm the one that's most likely to do something about our number one priority — and that is education . . . We've just got to say enough, time to do something else now."

He banged his hand on the podium for emphasis.

Green returned fire by intently listing his actions as the city's public advocate, tossing in names of real New Yorkers who'd helped him understand the problems. He'd picketed the city on AIDS issues, sued the city for police discipline records and visited 50 schools.

"I don't have to say, I will be good, pure and simple, pure and simple, pure and simple," Green said. "I have been."

Green was himself, tossing insults at his opponent and grinning at his own answers..

"It is true that a person who tries to buy City Hall has fewer conflicts of interest," Green said, referring to Bloomberg's record-breaking $41 million self-financed campaign. "I'm not trying to win an auction. I'm trying to earn an election."

Mayor Giuliani, Mayor-Elect Bloomberg, Public Advocate Green, Comptroller Hevesi, Borough Presidents Ferrer, Markowitz, Miller, Molinari, Vallone and Weprin have all endorsed Michael Bloomberg for Mayor.

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