by Susan Reefer
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Most people have probably forgotten that September 11, 2001, started out as a day when New York City held primary elections. That memory may resurface for many as they head to the polls on the eve of the anniversary, September 10th, for this year's primary.

This year's primary election is not just a calendar year away from the attacks, but it comes at the end of a year when the political fortunes of many candidates have been deeply affected by the implications of the tragedy. The attacks were the background of political life in New York starting with last year's mayoral race and continuing through this year's race for governor.

CAMPAIGN 2001

On September 11th, the primary was canceled by noon. Like other New Yorkers, the candidates for political office not just the race for mayor, but some 400 candidates for other local races stopped what they were doing. For a while, many considered it in bad taste to campaign.

But the primary was rescheduled, there was then a Democratic mayoral run-off, and within a month, the contest was between Democratic Mark Green and Republican Michael Bloomberg.

Mark Green was the Public Advocate, someone with years of political experience. Mike Bloomberg was a businessman who had never run for political office before. The city's response to the attacks became an issue almost immediately.

Sitting Mayor Rudy Giuliani had become a symbol of strong leadership in a time of crisis: his confidence and compassion had brought assurance and inspiration to a city badly in need of both. Although the new term limits law meant he was unable to run for a third term as mayor, New Yorkers of every political persuasion were grateful to him for his role in the days and weeks following the attacks.

Against this backdrop, Mark Green choose to make a public comment critical of the mayor's recent job performance. His remarks suggested he would have or could have done as good a

job if he himself had been mayor. Whether or not this statement was accurate, it was considered highly inappropriate and mean-spirited, and Green was widely criticized for making it.

At about the same time, Giuliani endorsed Bloomberg. Although Bloomberg was running as a Republican, the same party Giuliani belonged to, the two men came from very different backgrounds and were not natural political allies. But the fact that Giuliani made the decision under these unusual circumstances only made the endorsement more compelling. Giuliani's decision to make Bloomberg his public choice had a profound and immediate impact on the race.

Endorsements have long been seen as a way to increase a candidate's stature, or to deliver one small, loyal block of voters, or to decorate a campaign with a well-known name. Never before has an endorsement had the effect of changing the dynamics of a campaign the way this endorsement did.

THE GOVERNOR'S RACE

It would seem almost impossible that a candidate running for high office in New York could fail to learn from another candidate's mistake just five months earlier. But it happened, this time in the governor's race.

Andrew Cuomo, a candidate for the Democratic nomination for governor, was leading in the polls in early 2002. Then he criticized George Pataki's performance in the aftermath of September 11th as inept and ineffective; the governor, Cuomo said, had simply been holding Giuliani's coat.

Whether or not the remark cost him the nomination, he lost his lead in the polls not long afterwards. When he dropped out of the race a week before the primary, conceding to his primary opponent, H. Carl McCall, one newspaper ran the headline: "Cuomo Folds, Plans to Hold McCall's Coat."

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THE REBUILDING PLANS

New York City's rebuilding efforts will be a statewide, as well as a nationwide. focus for years to come. The question of how to best rebuild and revitalize lower Manhattan was a main theme for each of the major candidates for governor throughout the campaign.

Carl McCall has put an emphasis on economic recovery, with a plan to create 100,000 new jobs in the areas of financial services, biotechnology, information technology and business services. He also proposed an International Center for Commerce and Culture, designed to attract international business headquarters and make New York City the true financial capital of the world.

Although Andrew Cuomo ultimately dropped out of the race, his rebuilding plans were some of the most creative of any of the major candidates. He saw the rebuilt downtown area as a sort of high-tech capitalist utopia: New York City cultural landmarks, a relocated World Bank, an integrated transportation system, a developed waterfront with a harbor economy, and a newly commissioned World Institute of Health, doing valuable research while also creating a biotechnology economy.

Meanwhile Governor George Pataki is said to be the beneficiary of what one Democrat calls the "Ground Zero effect." Pataki has promised the victims' families that nothing would be built in the "footsteps" of the twin towers, the actual ground space once occupied by the buildings themselves.

The legacy of last fall's terror attacks will continue to be felt. The political implications are only just now emerging.

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