



Lee M. Miringoff and Barbara L. Carvalho

Like No Business I Know

The longest-running non-campaign on Broadway

It's the biggest non-campaign in New York US Senate history. A battle is being waged between two formally unannounced candidates who are repeatedly jabbing at each other even though Election Day is a year away. Their every pronouncement, big or small, attracts network attention and, at times, overshadows the presidential campaign. They have each cleared out their respective party fields and avoided primaries. Money is being raised, strategies mapped out. Public opinion surveys abound, and most voters have chosen sides. The air wars have commenced. Even by New York standards, the Big Apple hasn't seen anything quite like Hillary vs. Rudy.

No sooner had the dust settled in New York from Election Day '98, following a bruising Senate contest between Alfonse D'Amato and Charles Schumer, when four-term incumbent Daniel Patrick Moynihan announced he would not seek reelection. The open seat touched off an avalanche of speculation about many marquee names. The list of potential Senate wannabes on the Democratic side included a Kennedy, a McCall, a Lowey, a Baldwin and two Cuomos, and eventually, of course, a Clinton. The Republican lineup included a King, a Lazio, the Pataki (in a quickly extinguished switch scenario which had Pataki running for the Senate and vacating the Governor's Mansion for Giuliani) and finally, Giuliani. Rudy, after behind the scenes jostling, received Pataki's blessing and a clear path to the GOP nomination.

The Hillary vs. Rudy matchup offers New York voters two widely known political figures with great fund-raising potential and political cache. The 2000 race could offer no greater prize to pundits, pollsters, and pols alike than the Battle of the Century: the First Lady vs. the two-term New York City mayor. Pollsters, ourselves included, pounced on the race. Not since the days of "Mario Cuomo and Will He or Won't He?" has a New York non-campaign been so big a national news story.

Initial polls beckoned Hillary to take the plunge. Coming off the national embarrassment of Monica Lewinsky and the Impeachment Trial, a softer and more respected image of Hillary provided a springboard to political candi-

dacy. The Marist Poll in January 1999 had Hillary Clinton with a 10% lead over Rudy Giuliani. New York voting patterns were scrambled in this early measure, with Hillary leading Rudy upstate, the Republican stronghold, 50% to 42%. She was further encouraged by a gender gap which had her winning women overall by 24%.

The New York electorate in these early polls expressed doubts about Giuliani's people skills. Hillary Clinton was viewed as better able to work with others in the US Senate. Put another way, New York voters believed that Hillary, not Rudy, would work better with those senators who had just tried to remove her husband from office.

The poll numbers also revealed something the Clinton camp had to find disturbing, if not unexpected. Approximately half of the New York electorate was—and still is—concerned that Hillary Clinton is not from New York: the carpetbagger issue. It has contributed to Hillary's somewhat bumpy transition from celebrity Clinton to candidate Clinton. Her frequenting New York to advance her "listening tour," only to leave again to be First Lady, served as a reminder that she is not from New York; and her day job has forced her to balance conflicting roles. No greater evidence of these cross pressures need be found than in her November trip to Israel.

By year's end, most polls showed a numerical or statistical edge for Giuliani over Clinton. Hillary Clinton's trial balloons have come down to Earth. She still needs to answer the twin questions, "Why New York? Why now?" to the satisfaction of New York voters.

During this time, Rudy Giuliani has been able to capitalize on his incumbency as New York City mayor. Fending off a hurricane, dousing encephalitis-carrying mosquitoes, and celebrating the second consecutive sweep by the New York Yankees, Rudy is regarded by voters statewide as more of a fighter for New York than Hillary. For phase one of the campaign, governing has edged out listening.

The Giuliani effort is hardly free from serious downsides. He brings to the race high negative ratings statewide and a reputation for embroiling himself in skirmishes, big and small—the temperament issue. There are also historical difficulties that have beset New York City mayors seeking statewide office. For decades, the GOP has fostered an

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upstate/downstate rivalry. For some upstate voters, a New York City mayor is a *de facto* carpetbagger, as well.

In an attempt to exploit every possible advantage both Hillary and Rudy have demonstrated a decided overeagerness. Neither is particularly shy. Far from presenting smoothly executed game plans, their efforts to date have been quite blunderful. To Hillary's discredit, she took a page from Michael Dukakis' playbook (recall his tank ride photo op) and paraded with a Yankee cap.

Then, there's Clinton fatigue and how the Clintons are handling it. Hillary's reaction to President Clinton's clemency offer to the FALN Puerto Rican nationalists placed a convenient distance between herself and Administration policies. It was a redo of the Clinton-Clinton relationship tailor-made for the Senate race in New York. During most of the Clinton presidential years, Americans were offered a Clinton partnership on policy, vote for one and get two, but a noticeable coldness on the personal side. Now, there's a different formulation, one that suggests a personal closeness but a political distance.

The new approach seems designed to quiet the concerns of those who see the First Lady more in traditional terms. The message being communicated is that Hillary's relocation to New York will not be splitsville for her and Bill, nor will she be leaving the coop unguarded in Washington. There are photo ops aplenty: Bill and Hillary go on vacation... Bill and Hillary go house hunting... A magazine article has detailed their long-standing warmth. With twists and turns like these, no wonder some feel that when it comes to Clinton fatigue, New Yorkers are going through an especially bad bout.

For Rudy's part, New York City's alpha male mayor can be his own worst enemy. Take the carpetbagger issue, something costly to Hillary. Does Rudy let it play out, leaving the media to harangue Hillary and pollsters to measure the fallout? Not on your life. Instead, the Arkansas flag flies over City Hall in New York in a not-so-subtle jab at Hillary. This harping on Hillary's carpetbagger problem only underscores his own temperament problem. Then, when he mistakes Monroe County, New York, for Monroe, New York in Rockland County, it only makes matters worse. Rudy has the tendency to strike out as if he were under constant attack. In the sum of these skirmishes, he shapes a political persona voters find troublesome. In the recent controversy involving the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Mayor challenged an exhibit which, he argued, was offensive on religious grounds. He tried to withdraw funds from the Museum. Although he may have been successful in feeding his white Catholic core constituency and in beefing up his conservative credentials, the New York electorate, for the

most part, gave the Mayor a "thumbs down" for his actions.

As we look ahead to the coming year and the eventual choice of New York voters, the best thing both Clinton and Giuliani have going for them is their opponent. So far, most polls conducted by different organizations throughout the past year typically find both Hillary and Rudy getting forty-something. Each one's support seems to have a ceiling above and a floor beneath. What is striking in this contest is the quickly vanishing undecided vote. Rather than swing-voters determining the winner and loser, the outcome is more likely to be a product of who is better able to mobilize his or her base. Attention will also be focused on any support Hillary or Rudy can garner from minor party lines.

The New York State electorate is divided into three distinct regions. New York City is largely in Hillary's column. Rudy does slightly better in New York City for a Republican, but you can't tell that he has been a popular mayor in this largely Democratic city when paired against Hillary. The suburbs around New York City are often the swing area in statewide elections, but not in this matchup. Rudy has secured suburban support from the pluses he has brought to New York City, without the fallout from his testiness. If Rudy gets entangled in a dispute with the New York City Chancellor of Schools, for instance, suburban voters couldn't care less.

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This leaves upstate, the place where most of the acres and voters are found, as the unusual battlefield for this race. Hillary hopes to use her First Lady status and the issues she intends to emphasize to attract women voters to her side. Rudy hopes that anti-Clinton feelings and GOP leanings overcome any memories these voters have of his 1994 endorsement of Mario Cuomo or the upstate/downstate rivalry that has fueled many a statewide contest in the past.

Private campaign polls are undoubtedly showing what the public polls have found about the strategic importance of upstate. Both Hillary and Rudy have targeted the locale to launch their first salvo of campaign ads. Fifty million campaign dollars later, concern about Clinton the carpetbagger and Giuliani's short fuse are likely to be joined by voter fatigue over what is emerging as the longest running political show to hit Broadway. ●