

## The Mayoral Races A Short History to Look Back on in the New Year

By Joseph Mercurio

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Vincent R. Impellitari, the City Council President (as the Public Advocate was known then), became mayor when William O'Dwyer resigned a year into his second term because of charges that linked him to organized crime. The following year, in the 1950 special election, Impellitari lost the Democratic Primary, but won the General Election on the Experience Party line with 1,161,175 votes, 46.8% in a three way race, becoming the first mayor elected without the support of a major party. He lost reelection to Manhattan Borough President Robert F. Wagner.

Abraham D. Beame was appointed budget director in 1952 by Impellitari. Later, he ran on the citywide ticket with Wagner to become City Comptroller in 1961 and then went on to run for mayor. He lost to John Lindsay in the 1965 General Election by 102,407 out of the 2,537,031 votes cast. The Democrats were intent on taking back City Hall, but in the 1969 Democratic Primary, Mario Procaccino won a five way race with 255,529 votes, just 32.8%. Wagner, who had been elected mayor in 1953, 1957 and 1961, was down only 31,065 votes placing second. Herman Badillo, then Bronx Borough President, was down another 38,363 for third place. After losing the Republican Primary, Lindsay went on to win reelection on the Liberal Party and an independent party line.

Upset over having a weak candidate lose to a person who could not even win the Republican Primary a law was passed requiring the city to hold a runoff if the mayoral candidate does not receive 40% of the primary vote. In a comeback, Beame received 266,462 votes in the 1973 four-way primary, 34.5% of the vote, with Badillo coming in second, down only 42,626 votes. Beame then won the Runoff and the General Election. Badillo claimed that they changed the law to prevent a minority candidate from emerging. Of course, that would only be the case if the Hispanic candidate came in first in the primary only to be defeated in the run-off, which was not the case for Badillo.

Having been Budget Director, Comptroller and then Mayor, Beame rightfully took the brunt of criticism for the fiscal crisis of the '70s. As a result, he came in third in the 1977 six way Democratic Primary with Badillo placing last. Koch beat Cuomo by 9,760 votes in the Primary, by 77,627 votes in the Runoff and by 194,434 votes in the General Election, where the Republican ran in the single digits. (Cuomo went on to defeat Koch in the 1982 primary and become governor after defeating a rich Republican in November.)

Democratic Party officials and city appointees were prosecuted by US Attorney Rudy Giuliani. Koch lost a fourth try in the 1989 primary to Manhattan Borough President David Dinkins, who received enough votes to avoid a run-off. A law had been passed to prevent all city elected officials from seeking a third consecutive term. Giuliani ran against Dinkins but was defeated by 47,080 votes in a hotly contested race becoming the city's first black mayor, but he lost reelection to Giuliani in 1993 by an equally slim

53,340 votes. Giuliani easily won reelection after precipitous drops in crime, defeating Manhattan Borough President Ruth W. Messinger in a landslide, but was prevented from seeking a third term because of term limits. Giuliani and the Republican Party supported Democrat turned Republican billionaire Mike Bloomberg, who switched parties because he did not think he could win a Democratic Primary now dominated by minority voters.

Ironically, Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer, who came in first in the 2001 four way primary, did place second in the run-off. Upset over the way their favorite son was defeated in the primary, Hispanic voters stayed home in the General Election weakening Green enough to be defeated by Bloomberg who had himself defeated an Hispanic candidate, Badillo, in the Republican Primary. (Badillo, rejected three times for mayor as a Democrat, had changed parties after Giuliani's election.) Bloomberg, the first Republican to succeed a member of his own party for mayor, won by less than the margin he received on the Independence Party line out of just 1,480,602 votes cast.

Before the last election, Giuliani had a period of very poor poll numbers, but became Mayor of the World after 9/11. Also after the attack, voters wanted to come together forgetting party. These facts together with low Democratic turnout will be hard to repeat.

Will the Democrats be as intent on defeating Bloomberg as they were at defeating Lindsay? More later.

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