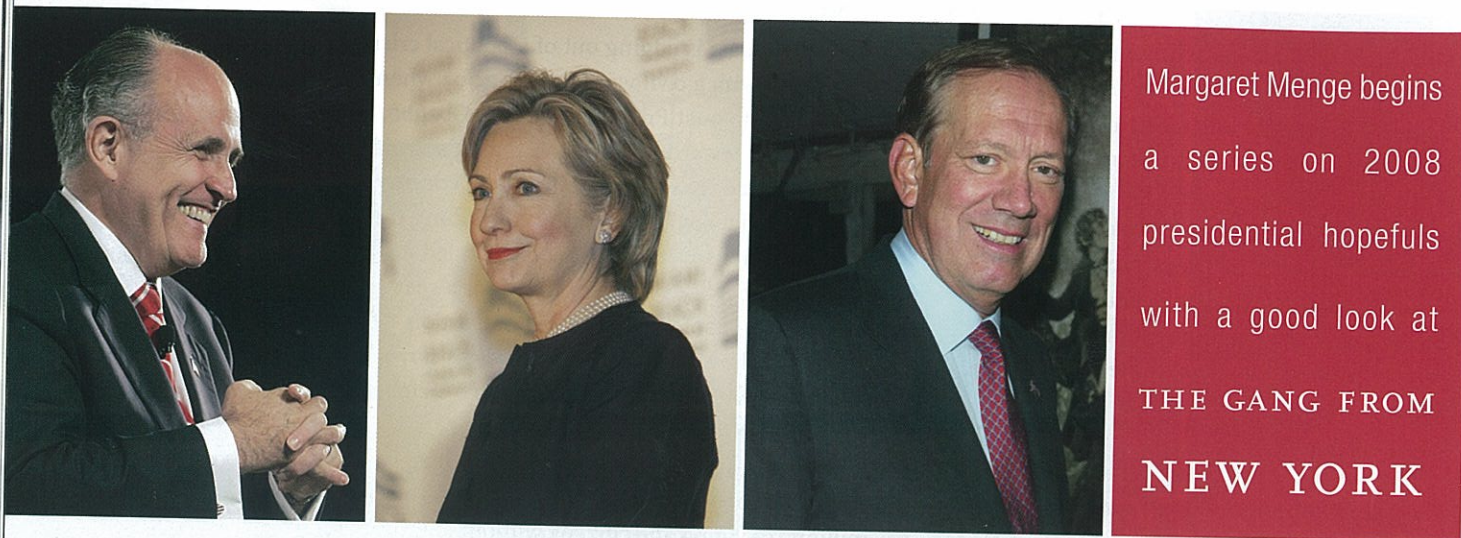


N A T I O N A L S c e n e



Three New Yorkers are planning to run for president in 2008, and at least two of them will be top contenders. For all of its high visibility, however, New York is not necessarily the best state to use as a springboard for the presidency. Even after 9/11, New York is seen by people outside of it as something "other": not quite like the rest of America, and Americans don't see themselves in New York politicians. It's the Al Smith curse.

Al Smith was a popular New York governor in the 1920's, but when he went out into the rest of America to campaign for president, people didn't get him. Will the three New York-based politicians listed below suffer the same fate? Perhaps not to the same extent as Al Smith, but they will face challenges in fashioning themselves as palatable, national candidates hailing from the Big Apple.

GEORGE PATAKI No one can figure this guy out. He's so *un-New York*, or at least *New York City*. He has a soft demeanor and has never (as far as anyone remembers) had a good haircut. And yet, he's been elected three times as the governor of New York, and never lost an election in his political career.

Pataki got his start as mayor of Peekskill, New York, a small Hudson River town about an hour north of New York City. He grew up on a working farm, and when he became governor, the town threw a parade for him – a small-town salute to a small-town boy.

Somehow, Pataki has defied the odds, holding onto the governorship as a Republican in a Democratic state. There have been indications over the years that he is more shrewd than he seems. Taped phone conversations with one of his top political guys that were printed in the *New York Post* last year revealed a politician who is willing to play hardball, and who manages his public image very carefully.

So can he win? Pataki would have to overcome two big hurdles: he's pro-choice, and most people know nothing about him. A February poll showed that he was the least well known of all the presumed 2008 presidential candidates – 20 percent of those

polled by Fox News/Opinion Dynamics said they'd never heard of George Pataki.

Still, his soft sell, coupled with the fact that he's the only one of the three New York candidates who has held a governorship – thought to be the "minor leagues" of presidential politics – may prove a winning combination.

RUDY GIULIANI The Republicans' best hope, the man with the most star power, probably isn't in the game. He'll go down in history as the guy who brought New York City back, first from spiraling crime and urban ruin, then with his leadership after 9/11. He's larger than life, and the personification of New York, which could be just the problem.

Americans love Giuliani. He stood tall when the country was devastated, and looking for a leader. But in the end that may not matter. There are some things that New York politicians can get away with that wouldn't fly anywhere else. When 9/11 happened, for instance, Giuliani had split with his wife and was living in a posh Manhattan apartment with two gay men (and a Shih Tzu, it's rumored). Now he's remarried, and the head of Giuliani Partners, a security consulting firm and public relations outfit, which he started with ex-NYC police chief Bernard Kerik.

He is also pro-choice and a gun-control proponent. The National Rifle Association is one of the most powerful political organizations, with over four-million members who will go out and vote in Republican primaries. And the issue of abortion is an even more serious problem for Giuliani: 78% of Republicans oppose abortion either completely or with some exceptions, according to a Zogby International poll from January of this year.

Could he change his stance? Anything's possible. Bill Clinton was once pro-life. But it would be hard for Giuliani to do a switch just two years out from the election, and it isn't likely he'd try: this is not a man who tries to make you think he's something he's not.

However, in a WNBC/Marist College poll from February of this year, Giuliani and Hillary are head-to-head, with 48 percent of registered voters saying they would vote for Giuliani, and 47 percent saying they would vote for Hillary – if the race were between the two.

HILLARY CLINTON We all know her, but more as an icon than as a politician. Few people seem to really know what she stands for. Still, she's the presumptive nominee, which means: she's it. That's what a lot of people say. But then, a lot of people say different! There are powerful Democrats who would like to see someone else take the lead for the Democratic nomination. Think Hillary cares? No. She knows what she wants and she's gunning for it. And this is what makes her so riveting as a female politician; like men of ambition, she doesn't wait to be asked.

As a U.S. senator representing New York, she voted to give the president the authority to go to war in Iraq, a move which seemed politically smart at the time, but which is presently not serving her well among Democrat voters. She's been a strong voice on the issue of health care – pressing for coverage for all Americans – but won't say that if elected she'd go as far as Republican governor Mitt Romney has in Massachusetts and force Americans to carry health insurance.

Susan Estrich, who, as campaign manager for Michael Dukakis in 1992, was the first woman to head a major-party presidential campaign, wrote a book last year (*The Case for Hillary Clinton*) in which she argued that the time to elect a woman president is *now*, and that Hillary is that woman. The book didn't explain why that should be, other than the fact that Hillary is a well-positioned woman. In a FOX News interview last year, Bill O'Reilly couldn't pin Estrich down and get her to explain what Hillary stands for. What would Hillary do if elected president? No one knows.

In terms of New York candidates, she's less associated with the state than Pataki or Giuliani. She's a Chicago girl, after all, a Midwesterner who was somewhat out of place as the wife of a southern governor. She got the progressive bug when she was in high school, and came to believe, fervently, in using government to cure social ills. We just don't see as much of that now. Clinton rarely takes controversial positions now as the primary season approaches, and issues press releases at the rate of about 85 a day, none of which have her saying anything of substance. However, she is – more than a senator from New York, and more than the wife of Bill – the leader of what *The New Republic* calls "a vast political empire based in Washington and New York that, in its scale and ambition, is unrivaled in Democratic politics." She has some of the best political people on her side – Democratic. ○

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