

Signs That Rudy, Hillary Are Not Invincible

In the short span of two weeks what appeared to be two very strong leading candidates in the run-up to next year's presidential election have suddenly transformed into problem-plagued contestants, facing threats to their frontrunner status as the campaign approaches a much more demanding phase.

United States Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, who has led virtually every major poll of Democratic hopefuls for more than a year, was the first to have her supposed invincibility questioned after stumbling in a debate about 16 days ago.

Polls taken after that event showed her losing ground to her closest pursuer, U.S. Senator Barack Obama.

Last week, it was nail-biting time for supporters of former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, the Republican frontrunner, as many serious questions arose about his judgment in selecting top lieutenants after the searing indictment of his hand-picked Police Commissioner and Corrections Commissioner, Bernard Kerik.

The question each will have to answer henceforth, if they are to regain their dominance over their competitors is: Do they have what it takes to run the vast, pressure-packed, sensitive office of the president?

In Clinton's case, the usually self-assured, in-control-at-all-times, former First Lady seemed to lose her composure when rivals Obama and John Edwards turned up the pressure as she started to give contradictory answers on several issues.

It wasn't the kind of performance that inspires confidence in millions of voters who must choose the person they are convinced is best for the job.

It didn't help that Bill Clinton, in trying to explain away her poor performance, charged her rivals were involved in some sort of conspiracy. The ex-president's defense appeared to go to unnecessary lengths, when all that was really needed was his strong reaffirmation that she was capable of handling any amount of pressure, and the debate might just have been an off night.

In Giuliani's case, the major question his supporters and others who have not yet made a choice must resolve is: When

does his loyalty to a subordinate end if there is evidence that an original judgment was wrong?

In Kerik's case, one of the various reports in the press said that the former federal attorney and mayor ignored a number of warning signs when, in 2000, he chose Kerik as police commissioner, over the objections of more than half his cabinet.

A *New York Times* story about an *Associated Press* interview with Giuliani quotes the ex-mayor as saying, "There were mistakes made with Bernie Kerik." In the same story, he was quoted as saying at the time when Kerik was being considered for appointment as the federal Homeland Security secretary, "It was a mistake not checking him out as thoroughly as I should have."

Considering that Kerik eventually withdrew from being considered for the Homeland Security position, one of the most sensitive in the government, Giuliani must have learned something that he has refused to publicly admit, and he hasn't stepped away from his close friend and business associate yet. It's hard to see why he owes Kerik such loyalty and the public will have to await Giuliani's reaction if

Kerik is eventually convicted of charges.

Meanwhile, a day after the indictment against Kerik was released to the public, a poll taken on the upcoming New Hampshire GOP primary showed that Giuliani had lost ground to Mitt Romney, who now leads Giuliani by 11 percentage points.

One good thing that happened to Giuliani was that last week he picked up a key endorsement from the Rev. Pat Robertson, a Christian conservative leader.

BROWN, DEM JUDGES ELECTED: Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown cited his office as one of the premier prosecutorial offices in New York State last week following his uncontested election to a fifth term. He thanked his own Democratic Party and the Republican and Conservative organizations for supporting his re-election bid and said he looked forward to the next four years and remains committed to an aggressive, proactive approach in dealing with criminal conduct in Queens County.

Meanwhile, six Democratic Party judgeship candidates won three state Supreme Court and three Civil Court judge races easily by 3-to-1 margins, according to unofficial returns.

Winning the Supreme Court posts were Denis J. Butler, Kenneth C. Holder and Steven W. Paynter. All had been Civil Court judges until running for the Criminal Court seats they won.

Victors in the Civil Court judge contests were Rudy G. Greco and William A. Viscovich, each of whom was unopposed, and Cheree A. Buggs, who defeated Robert Belrani.

CUOMO TAKES ON GLOBAL WARMING: Moving on from successful strikes against Medicaid fraud and college student loan practices, New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo has joined with his counterparts in 15 states to fight for the states' rights to take action on global

warming pollution resulting from vehicle emissions.

In his announcement about taking the action, Cuomo stated: "We are filling the void left by the Bush [presidential] administration's refusal to protect the environment. If the federal government won't lead on this critical issue, it should get out of the way of states like New York that are moving forward with sensible steps to address the climate crisis."

WEINER RAPS RUDY'S RED SOX SWITCH: When Congress paused briefly last week to take note of the Boston Red Sox World Series victory, Congressman Anthony Weiner took the floor to gently berate Republican presidential hopeful Rudy Giuliani, heretofore, a die-hard New York Yankee fan, for switching his allegiance to the hated Red Sox in their Series efforts against the Colorado Rockies.

Weiner (D-Queens/Brooklyn) said he was surprised there was mention in the resolution of an MVT (Most Valuable Traitor) Award to be presented to Giuliani. Before he could elaborate on it any further, he was gavelled to a stop because his time ran out.

On a more serious note, Weiner, who is expected to be running for mayor in 2009, announced he had been cited as having had a perfect score (100) on middle-class issues during this session. The accolade came from the Drum Major Institute for Public Policy think tank. Weiner responded by pledging to continue to fight for New Yorkers as they continue to be squeezed by stagnant wages, skyrocketing gas prices, increasing health insurance premiums and rising college tuition costs.

CROWLEY HAILS VOTE ENDING JOBS BIAS: Following the passage of legislation by the Democrat-led House to end discrimination against gays and lesbians in the workplace, Congressman Joseph Crowley (D-Queens/The Bronx),

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