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4 in Attorney General Race Trade Attacks in TV Debate

By IAN FISHER

Two days before voters decide on a race with no clear leader and few defining issues, the four candidates in the Democratic race for state attorney general assailed each other yesterday for being too rich, too political or misleading voters by talking too much about crime.

In a televised debate — reflecting fierce competition for a sizable pool of undecided voters — the candidate who stayed farthest from the fray, Karen S. Burstein, a former Brooklyn Family Court judge, asked time and again what the exchanges had to do with the Attorney General's office.

Her point seemed proved in an attack initiated by G. Oliver Koppell, a former Bronx Assemblyman who was appointed Attorney General in December, against Elliot L. Spitzer, a former prosecutor with no political experience who has spent at least \$2.5 million of his own money in the race.

"Quite frankly, as far as I'm concerned, it's not particularly the American way to start at the top," Mr. Koppell said in a debate on "News Forum" on WNBC. "Mr. Spitzer is a bright fellow; there is no question about it, but you don't start running for statewide office before you've held responsible positions."

Attacks on Opponents

Mr. Spitzer fired back with attacks on his three opponents as creators of a failed criminal-justice system. Charles J. Hynes, the Brooklyn District Attorney, doloped abuse on Mr. Spitzer and Mr. Koppell, receiving little back in return. His advice for tomorrow: "Vote early and often."

But the battle on the airwaves, in the second of three scheduled debates on television, reflected only part of the overall war to win over undecided voters. The machinery of political organization, though not as potent as it was, also shifted into gear as four campaigns phoned, sent mailings and knocked on the doors of the Democrats they think are most likely to go to the polls.

The conventional wisdom is that in a race where turnout is expected to be low — perhaps as little as 500,000 of the state's 4.1 million registered Democrats — traditional organizational politics may provide a decisive edge. By that measure, Mr. Koppell has claimed to have the broadest net of workers: with the endorsement of the party's convention, he received the most endorsements from political clubs and labor organizations, which can run phone banks, hand out campaign literature and stand at polls.

He also carries an advantage with support from former Democratic colleagues in Assembly, each with their own organizations around the state. It is impossible to gauge how active his colleagues have been, but some members have held fund-raisers, and others, like Arthur O. Eve of Buffalo and Anthony J. Genovesi of Brooklyn, have sent out mailings to constituents urging a vote for Mr. Koppell.

"With a low turnout, those who have the organization and those who have the grass-roots support of other politicians usually prevail," Mr. Koppell said after the debate at the NBC studios in Rockefeller Center.

Enthusiasm at Issue

But as some political analysts said they saw little deep organization for any of the candidates, the Hynes campaign, which says its organization is strong, disputes the level of enthusiasm for Mr. Koppell. The Hynes campaign is counting on a heavy showing in Brooklyn, the city's largest borough, an important advantage, given that New York City makes up roughly two-thirds of the primary vote.

But no one knows whether promised help from labor and politicians will end up in a substantial number of votes. "Organizational endorsement does not always translate into good field operations," said Bill Lynch, a deputy mayor under Mayor David N. Dinkins who has run many get-out-the-vote efforts. "But if you have a good field operation, it can make a major difference in a close race."

Ms. Burstein and Mr. Spitzer have admittedly less organizational support, but both believe they can win on the enthusiasm for their campaigns among voters and volunteers. Both have been telephoning Democrats identified as the most likely voters, and both have sent out half a million pieces of mail each.

Mr. Spitzer, the only candidate to support the death penalty, has had the most visible presence on television, and the power of his family money to communicate his ideas has become a major issue in the campaign. His opponents have already begun to do the math on how much he will have spent per vote: if he spends \$3 million in the end, it could translate into more than \$20 a vote, assuming roughly one-fourth of 500,000 voters.

'His Father's Money'

In the debate, Mr. Spitzer was attacked several times for the amount of money he has spent — more than any of the other candidates has raised — and most harshly by Mr. Koppell, who said Mr. Spitzer "would

ISSUES

Democrats Running for Attorney General



KAREN S. BURSTEIN



CHARLES J. HYNES



G. OLIVER KOPPELL



ELLIOT L. SPITZER

	KAREN S. BURSTEIN	CHARLES J. HYNES	G. OLIVER KOPPELL	ELLIOT L. SPITZER
DEATH PENALTY	Against	Against	Against	Favors for specific crimes, including serial murder, murder of a police officer and other premeditated murders.
ROLE OF OFFICE	Says the attorney general is not a "super prosecutor" and has only limited power over street crime, but says violence, in the home or against the environment, should not be tolerated. Calls law the "civilizing force" for society and sees attorney general as the state's preeminent legal voice.	Wants to redefine attorney general's office to place more emphasis on crime. Says that the office could function as the chief lobbyist to the Legislature on criminal justice initiatives and wants to be a resource for law enforcement and the state's 62 district attorneys.	In nine months in office, has hewn to more traditional duties of the attorney general in defending the state and pursuing consumer fraud and environmental polluters. Rejects notion that the office need play a substantially larger role in crime, but has set up regional task forces on illegal guns.	Like Mr. Hynes, says the office should be expanded to have a greater role in criminal justice issues, especially in lobbying the Legislature for new laws. Has emphasized ideas in reforming juvenile justice system. Also would use existing powers of office in more criminal cases.
GUN CONTROL	Would consider an outright ban on handguns. Favors both licensing and waiting periods for handgun purchases. Favors both Federal and state bans on assault weapons and limits on clip sizes.	Favors both licensing and waiting periods for handgun purchases. Does not favor total ban on handguns. Favors both Federal and state bans on assault weapons and limits on clip sizes.	Favors both licensing and waiting periods for handgun purchases, and favors limits on number of handguns any individual may own. Favors both Federal and state bans on assault weapons and limits on clip sizes. Wants to make manufacturers and dealers liable for gun crimes when they transfer guns illegally. Does not support outright ban on handguns.	Has proposed "bullet control" by numbering all ammunition both on the lead and in the casing. Favors both licensing and waiting periods for handgun purchases. Would consider an outright ban on handguns. Favors both Federal and state bans on assault weapons and limits on clip sizes.
ENVIRONMENT	Would continue office's emphasis on enforcing environmental laws and favors using criminal statutes against polluters.	Wants to continue emphasis on environmental issues. Says record as prosecutor would help in bringing criminal cases against polluters.	Has pursued several civil cases against polluters. Favors using criminal statutes and won fines in some cases, but not jail time.	Favors prosecution of polluters with criminal statutes. Says he would pursue pollution problems caused by New York State itself.
GOVERNMENTAL CORRUPTION	Favors an expansion of duties for attorney general but is uncertain of exact role.	Favors using resources of attorney general's office, in tandem with local prosecutors, to develop more cases against public officials.	Says attorney general should have the power to investigate when appointed special prosecutor by the Governor. But sees limited role because of possible conflicts with the office's duty as lawyer for state government.	Sees expanded role, under current statutes, for attorney general to investigate government fraud and corruption.

not be sitting here today" if not for "his father's money."

"Let me tell you something, that's an insult to me," Mr. Spitzer replied. "I came to this campaign with ideas. The New York Post and The Daily News said that the three of you had been around for 20 years, but they

endorsed me because of my ideas."

In a campaign that had been getting less bitter than when it started, Mr. Hynes attacked Mr. Koppell for saying Gov. Mario M. Cuomo's abolition of the office of the special prosecutor for corruption in 1990, a job Mr. Hynes had held before his election as

District Attorney, was a mistake.

Ms. Burstein repeated her position on what has become a fundamental question in the campaign: does the attorney general's office play a major role in fighting crime? Mr. Hynes and Mr. Spitzer say the office should be redefined as the state's lobbyist to

the Legislature and coordinator on criminal-justice issues. Ms. Burstein and Mr. Koppell contend that the office has limited powers on crime but broad authority in other areas like the environment and civil rights.

"Promises are very easy to make and cheap in fact," she said.