

'Hola'—Latinos Join With Labor Unions To Win It for Pataki

"Hola," the young woman in the ear-phones begins, "le estoy llamando de la union SEIU 1199." The computer on her desk flashes a prompting text; callers to the left and right of her, all dressed in identical 1199 tee-shirts, echo the same message. "I'm calling from the union," a man a few cubbyholes away explains into his mouthpiece, "to remind you that this is election day and the union has endorsed Governor Pataki." Up and down the long row of operators, all conversations end the same way: "Hope to see you today at the polls."



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It's a scene that was repeated, with small variations, at scores of different locations across the city and state yesterday — the culmination of a months-long effort by, of all people, unions and grassroots community groups to get out the vote for the Republican gubernatorial candidate George Pataki.

The health and hospital workers
Please see LABOR, page 6

Labor, Latinos Help Pataki to a Victory

LABOR continued from page 1
union, 1199, mounted the biggest and best organized operation: a mammoth phone bank backed up by volunteers working in the streets to get out the vote. But several other unions, including the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the Union of Needle Trades, Industrial and Textile Employees (Unite!), ran their own call centers and fielded campaign workers in poor neighborhoods.

Further down the organizational chain, small-time entrepreneurs in neighborhoods as unlikely as Washington Heights, one of the poorest sections of the city, pulled voters out of their apartments and transported them to the polls. And one determined Pataki backer, the president of the New York State Federation of Taxi Drivers, Fernando Mateo, drove through the five boroughs stopping at the storefront businesses that dispatch livery cabs and used their two-way radios to make the case for the governor.

Together, it was these small-business owners and traditionally Democratic unions that put the governor over the top, reeling in what is expected to be the largest number of Latino voters ever to cast a ballot for a Republican in a New York statewide race.

The political arm of the health and hospital workers union is a huge, well-oiled machine: It fielded some 4,000 volunteers yesterday in what organizers emphasize was only the last push in a long campaign. The effort began more than seven months ago when the group's powerful president, Dennis Rivera, sent shock waves through the political establishment by endorsing the Mr. Pataki — the first Republican to get 1199's backing in more than 40 years. A series of mailings followed: Millions of pieces of catchy, colorfully printed literature featuring photos of the governor surrounded by members of the mostly minority union. Since then, Mr. Pataki has appeared repeatedly in public with Mr. Rivera and other officials, attending union events and marching in countless parades. Even the telephone bank operators have been making the case for more than a month now. So by yesterday, according to supervisors, 1199's callers hardly had to spell out why the union was

backing the governor. "We've made the case so thoroughly by now, we don't have to explain anything," said spokeswoman Jennifer Cunningham.

In fact, in each case, at all three unions and at street level in the neighborhoods, organizers were repaying favors granted by the governor during his long tenure. In the case of 1199, the debt begins — but does not end — with an \$1.8 billion raise that Mr. Rivera negotiated with Mr. Pataki earlier this year. In the case of Unite!, one of the most important sugar plums was a law prohibiting the state from buying uniforms made by non-union sweatshops. What finally swayed the teachers' union was an extra \$200 million in state aid for education. And what matters most the livery cab drivers is a measure that provides for stiffer penalties when a livery driver is mugged or murdered, then pays his family up to \$500 a week for a year after his death.

If some union members were hesitant to vote for a Republican, it was hardly evident at the phone banks or out in the streets of Latino New York. "At this point," said Ann Filloramo, director of the 1199 call center, "very few members question the endorsement." Fulvia de Leon, a Unite! factory worker who spent yesterday handing out palm cards in Washington Heights agreed. "You can tell from the way people look at you or what they say when they take the card. People in the neighborhood are enthusiastic." And what do organizers do about the occasional member who questions the endorsement? "We tell them we support candidates who support us," said Ms. Filloramo. "And Governor Pataki has supported us."

By and large, these organizing efforts were uncoordinated, though here and there they came together in a single neighborhood push. Yesterday afternoon, the Amigos de Pataki office in Washington Heights was overflowing with canvassers from both 1199 and Unite!, each group in their own brightly colored trademark tee-shirts. An additional 300 neighborhood volunteers fielded for the day by the local Amigos chapter were also streaming in and out of the center, resting in between shifts at

polling places and subway stops. The mood was upbeat: Organizers knew their candidate was going to win. The only question was by how much and what the margin among Latino voters would be. The fact that the governor is a Republican could hardly have seemed less relevant. "Hispanic voters don't really care if someone is a Democrat or a Republican," explained Angel Santana, a former policeman, now small-business owner and president of the Washington Heights Amigos group. "What matters is the candidate and what he has delivered for the community."

Together, the unions and grassroots groups behind the governor have a long reach throughout the city and state. The health and hospital workers union boasts 230,000 members, Unite! 90,000 and the UFT some 140,000 in New York City alone. As for livery drivers, there are some 20,000 non-medallion cabbies working the streets of the five boroughs, and according to Mr. Mateo, their sweep in the community is broader still: they transport some two to three million passengers a day — and during the day yesterday were telling them to go to the polls and vote for Mr. Pataki. In addition, according to Mr. Mateo, about 100 drivers had volunteered their time to transport disabled and elderly voters to their local polling places.

Of all the get-out-the vote efforts, Mr. Mateo's was the most unorthodox. A successful entrepreneur born in the Dominican Republic, Mr. Mateo took over the cab-driver federation four years ago in order to secure benefits for fellow Dominicans, who he says make up the lion's share of livery drivers and own virtually all the dispatching base stations in the city. Like the bigger, public-service

The half dozen base stations he visited on Election Day were all modest affairs: storefronts in poor neighborhoods from the South Bronx to Corona and Sunset Park. In each case, Mr. Mateo spent a few minutes chatting with drivers and asking about business, then took to the microphone in a glassed-in dispatcher's booth to put out the word. "Governor Pataki has done more for our community than any other governor in the history of New York," he proclaimed through the crackling radios of thousands of cabs throughout the city. "He has done the right thing by us and now we should do the right thing by him."

Last night, Mr. Pataki returned the favor in his victory speech telling Latino supporters, "*A mis amigos, gracias por su apoyo.*"