

Ad agencies square off

New York Senate race also features scorching battle between fiercely competitive image-makers

By Michael McCarthy
USA TODAY

NEW YORK — There's a good reason first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's campaign slogan is simply "Hillary." Her ad team wants it that way.

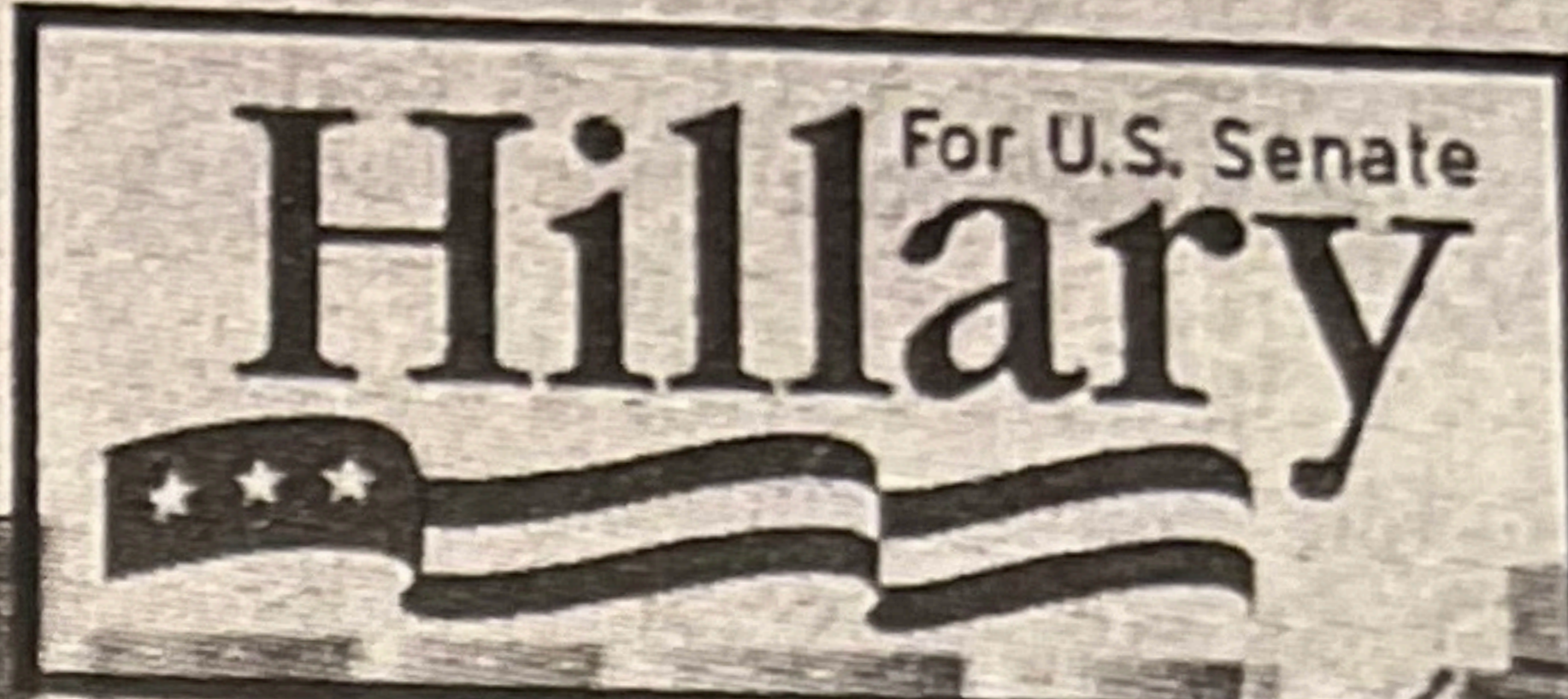
There's also a very good reason New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has come out fighting against domestic violence in his new TV commercials. His ad team wants it that way.

This is what the expected costliest Senate race in history is coming down to? What the ad teams want? You bet.

The Hillary-Rudy brawl is not only the most closely watched U.S. Senate race this year; it also might rival the presidential race in national interest. And whoever wins will owe a debt to some of the nation's craftiest image-makers.

The opposing ad teams are almost as different as their candidates.

► In Hillary's Democratic corner is DeVito/Verdi, a street-fighting downtown New York shop. And they're a rarity in



COVER STORY

politics these days: a Madison Avenue ad agency rather than political specialists. Principals Ellis Verdi and Sal DeVito have zero political experience.

But they have tangled with Rudy — in a free speech battle that reached the U.S. Supreme Court. And this year, they outraged the New York Police Department with an ad for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) about the case of Amadou Diallo, killed by police.

► In Rudy's Republican corner is The Victory Group, a Tampa-based political ad agency. Principal Adam Goodman is a second-generation media consultant.

Along with Roger Ailes, his father, Robert Goodman, is one of the legendary Republican image handlers. The son represents the new breed of "young gun" media consultants: faster, fiercer and more high tech.

Goodman's attack ads helped defeat Democratic challenger Ruth Messinger in Rudy's 1997 mayoral re-election campaign. This GOP gun-for-hire has worked with everybody from New Jersey Gov. Christine Todd Whitman to Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott.

While Hillary and Rudy are exchanging blows on a near daily basis, their ad executives are mixing it up, too.

"As opposed to DeVito/Verdi, I don't



RUDY GIULIANI U.S. SENATE

By Janet Durrans for USA TODAY, top; and Eileen Blass, USA TODAY, bottom

Opposing forces: Clinton campaign consultants Ellis Verdi, above left, and Sal DeVito talk on the streets of New York's SoHo neighborhood. Giuliani's man, Adam Goodman, bottom, is surrounded by TV monitors and editing equipment at Chelsea Post Studio in

Verdi sells N.Y. on Sen. Hillary

By Ira Teinowitz

How does it feel to be an advertising executive for a political candidate whose husband regularly has you travel to his workplace to give advisory reports and critiques of your ads?

For Ellis Verdi, it proved to be an intriguing introduction to politics. Of course, Mr. Verdi's candidate was first lady Hillary Clinton, who was running for the U.S. Senate seat from New York, the workplace was the White House and the husband was President Bill Clinton.

"We were in a weekend meeting at the White House, sitting around a small conference table for hours, six or seven of us including Hillary and Bill, and we were presenting the first TV [spots]," said Mr. Verdi, president of DeVito/Verdi, New York.

Mr. Verdi and Sal DeVito, the agency's creative director, were the Madison Avenue component of Team Hillary, the ad team for Mrs. Clinton's campaign created by Mandy Grunwald, president of Grunwald Communications, Washington. The team also included pollster Mark Penn of Penn & Shoeb, Washington.

While most of the successful campaign's ads were completed by Ms. Grunwald, DeVito/Verdi did the campaign's first biographical ad and several others, including one widely shown in upstate New York accusing Mrs. Clinton's opponent, U.S. Rep. Rick Lazio, of ignoring upstate New York's economic problems. The spot featured a picture of an ostrich sticking his head in the sand.

RETOOLED STRATEGY

Hired when New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani was expected to be Mrs. Clinton's opponent, DeVito/Verdi had attracted the campaign's attention with ads for *New York* magazine that tweaked Mr. Giuliani so successfully that the mayor attempted to have them banned from New York buses. The ads claimed the magazine was "Possibly the only good thing in New York Rudy hasn't taken credit for." Its ads for the American Civil Liberties Union also caught the campaign's attention.

The agency was part of the team

to discuss changes that would be necessary after Mr. Giuliani suddenly dropped out of the race. "The campaign had done a lot of research on Giuliani and we were ready for a significant battle with two larger-than-life characters. With Lazio, we had to retool conceptually and strategically," Mr. Verdi said.

'ONE SHOT'

Mr. Verdi said although the shop produced only a few ads for the campaign that ran, he is happy with his experience. "It is very different from a campaign for a marketer. There are time constraints from the minute you start. You have one shot [to convince the voter] and then it is over. And unlike normal advertising, voters learn

more about campaigns from the press than from actual advertising."

Ms. Grunwald said the campaign credits DeVito/Verdi for good ideas and said the campaign didn't use the agency more because of some of the quick turnaround problems endemic to politics.

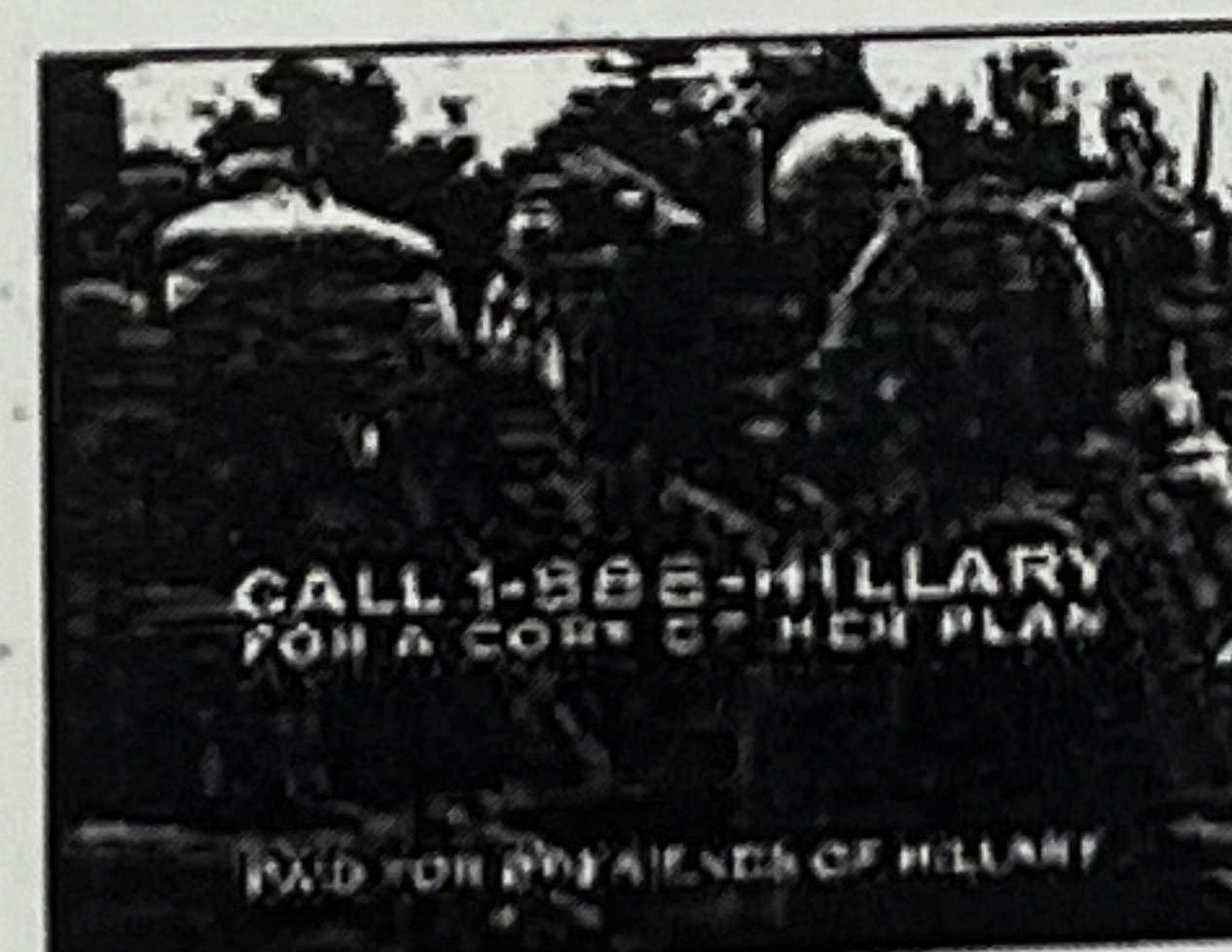
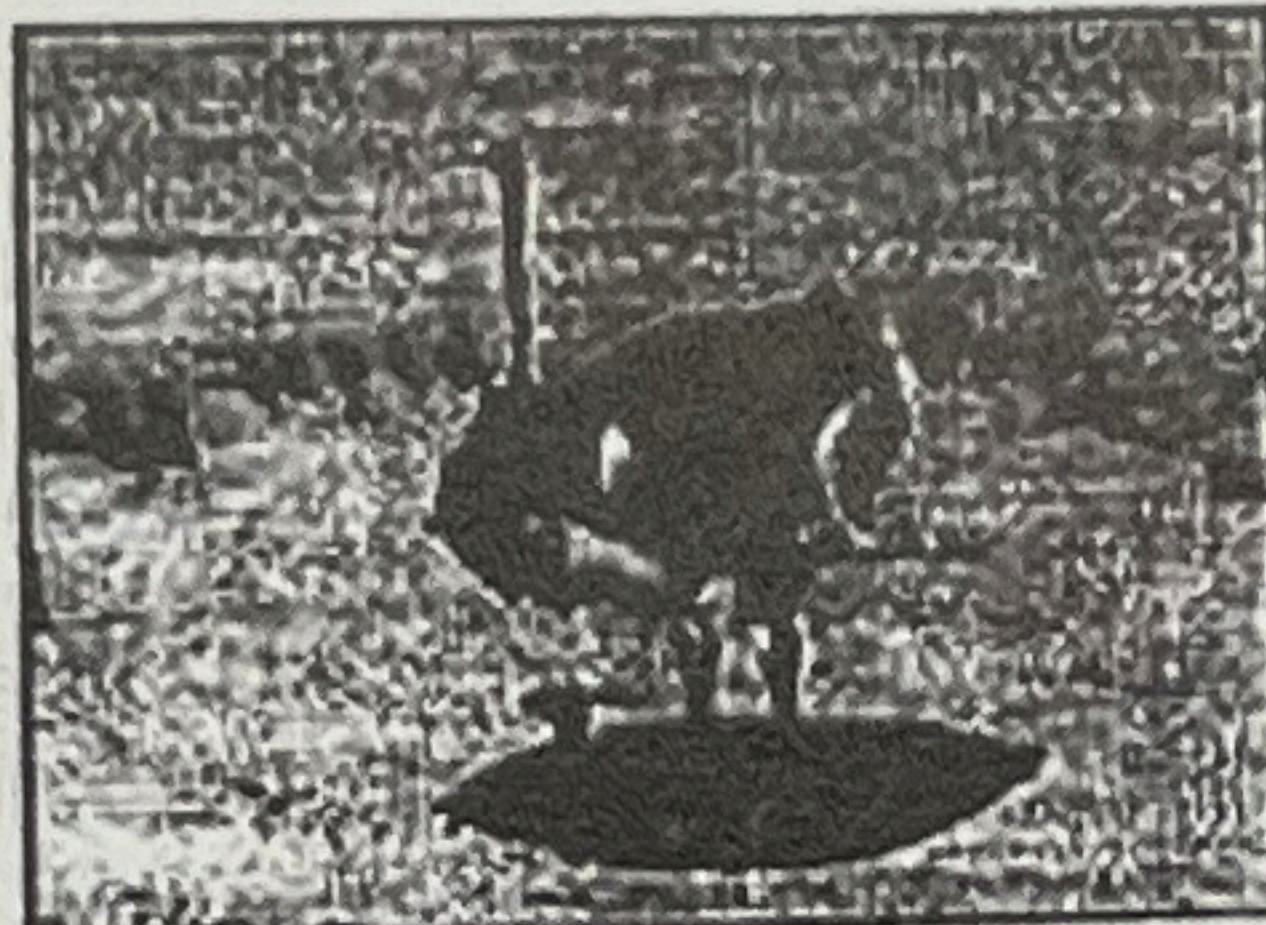
"They are really very fast for a Madison Avenue firm. The ostrich ad on the upstate economy was a perfect assignment for them because they had time to think about it. But on the political side, so much is changing so fast, it is [usually] faster and easier to make the ads overnight our-

selves than to explain it."

She gave as example an ad produced when the campaign heard GOP phone-bank callers were attempting to suggest that a donation to Mrs. Clinton's campaign tied her to the Oct. 12 bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen.

"We strategized, made some ads accusing the Lazio campaign of exploiting the issue and tested the ads all within 24 hours, held the ad for a day because we didn't want to be accused of exploiting the issue, then when we saw editorials from *The New York Times* and *Newsday*, re-edited the ad and had it to stations by 10 a.m." That lightning turnaround may have been tough for any Madison Avenue shop, she said.

Mr. Verdi agreed there are major differences between political ads and product marketing. "There's a general sense that most political advertising is not to be believed or trusted," he said. □



No hiding: Verdi's spot said Mrs. Clinton's rival ignored problems.

The Metro Section

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THURSDAY, JUNE 22, 2000

The New York Times

THE AD CAMPAIGN

Smiling-Surrogate Approach to Attacks

Hillary Rodham Clinton's Senate campaign plans to begin broadcasting these two new 30-second advertisements downstate tonight.

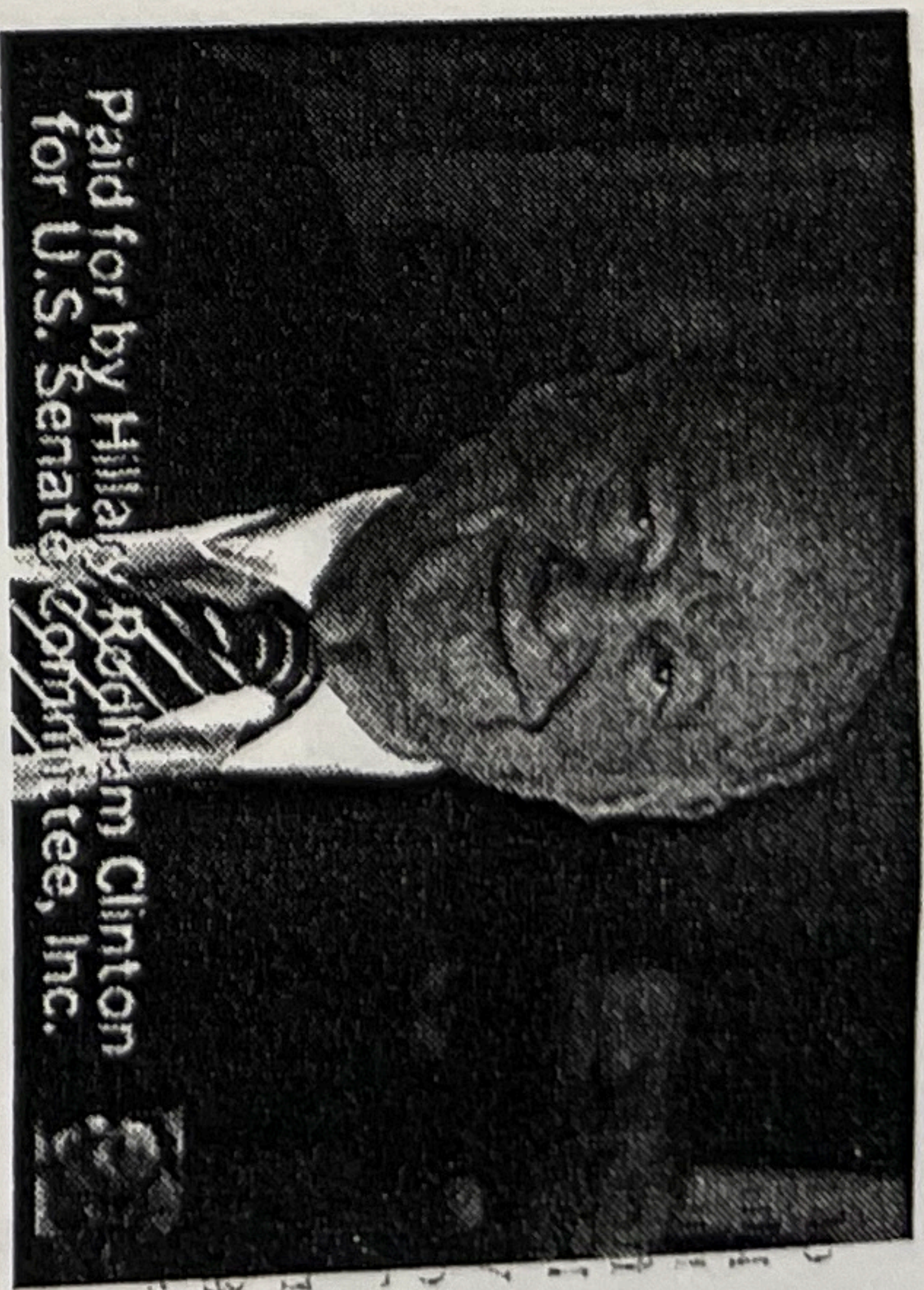
PRODUCER DeVito/Verdi, along with Mandy Grunwald, the media consultant, and Mark Penn, the pollster.

ON THE SCREEN Both advertisements feature Edward I. Koch, talking into the camera, sitting in a booklined office.

THE SCRIPT "I like Rick Lazio, but I am not voting for him. He's wrong on too many issues. He opposes licensing and registration of handguns, which I support and Hillary supports. He's not really pro-choice because he won't support funding abortion for poor women, which I support and Hillary supports. And he was willing to run on the Independence line with Pat Buchanan, which I could never agree with. Hillary had the guts to say no way to Buchanan. She's my choice. Trust me. I love New York."

The second version of the commercial drops the line on Mr. Buchanan, and adds: "And he's not really for the patients' bill of rights, because he voted against the right to sue your H.M.O."

ACCURACY As Mr. Koch notes, Mr. Lazio opposes Mrs. Clinton's proposal to register new guns and license gun holders. The advertisement does not note that Mr. Lazio has supported two major pieces of gun control legislation, a ban on most types of assault weapons, and the Brady law. The definition of pro-choice is clearly up for grabs these days; as Mr. Koch notes, Mr. Lazio opposes public financing of abortion, though he supports legal abortion. Mr. Koch does not mention that Mr. Lazio, unlike Mrs. Clinton, opposes the kind of procedure that abortion opponents call partial birth



Paid for by Hillary Rodham Clinton for U.S. Senate Committee, Inc.

abortion; presumably, Mr. Koch did not draw that contrast because he agreed with Mr. Lazio. Mr. Lazio also sought, unsuccessfully, to run as the Independence Party's Senate candidate; unlike Mrs. Clinton, he said he was willing to run if the party backed Mr. Buchanan for president. The advertisement's portrayal of Mr. Lazio's position on regulation of health maintenance organizations is imprecise: he says he supports legislation that allows patients to sue H.M.O.'s, albeit it under far more limited circumstances than allowed by the Democratic bill he voted against.

SCORECARD Mr. Koch is making an early appearance in this campaign — and this time, the former Democratic mayor is actually appearing on behalf of a Democratic candidate for Senate (He made a commercial in 1998 on behalf of Senator Alfonse M. D'Amato, a Republican). The use of this durable symbol of New York City, and his farewell line — "I love New York" — is intended to address concerns about Mrs. Clinton's attempt to run for office in a state where she had not previously lived. Beyond that, it is a fairly standard-issue attack ad with a popular and smiling surrogate taking care of the attacks. This is the first time Mrs. Clinton has raised Mr. Lazio's willingness to run on a party line with Mr. Buchanan. The rest of the issues are part of what has been a concerted effort by her to portray her rival as conservative.

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The Metro Section

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TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2000

The New York Times

Clinton Campaign Hires Agency That Created Advertisements Tweaking Mayor on City Buses

By DAVID M. HERSZENHORN

Hillary Rodham Clinton has hired the Manhattan advertising firm whose ads for New York magazine in 1997 enraged Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani to produce the media campaign in her bid for the United States Senate, officials said yesterday.

The firm, DeVito/Verdi, has a reputation for edgy, streetwise advertising but has no previous experience working for political candidates. The firm will work with two veteran Democratic operatives: Mandy Grunwald, a media consultant, and Mark Penn, a pollster.

DeVito/Verdi, based in SoHo, de-

veloped an ad campaign that ran on the sides of public buses featuring pictures of Mr. Giuliani and proclaiming New York magazine as "possibly the only good thing in New York Rudy hasn't taken credit for."

The ads appeared in November 1997, shortly after Mr. Giuliani was overwhelmingly re-elected for a second term. But the mayor, infuriated at being portrayed as self-aggrandizing, complained to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which removed the ads until a federal appeals court ordered them restored.

Advisers to Mrs. Clinton confirmed the components of the cam-

paign's media team yesterday after David Doak, a political media consultant in Washington, said he would not be joining the Clinton team.

"We had some long negotiations and couldn't come to terms on a number of things," said Mr. Doak, who is a longtime associate of Harold Ickes, the former White House chief of staff who is Mrs. Clinton's senior political adviser. "Hillary Clinton has been a friend of mine for 20 years. I wish her the best."

Others close to the Clinton campaign and in the political-consulting business suggested that money and control had been sticking points in

the talks with Mr. Doak, particularly the issue of who would have ultimate authority on a large media team with several strong personalities.

Ms. Grunwald, a New York native, has her own media-consulting firm in Washington and has worked for President Clinton, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York and Ruth Messinger, the former Manhattan borough president, in her unsuccessful 1997 mayoral campaign. Mr. Penn, who has also worked for Mr. Clinton and other Democrats, is a partner in Penn & Schoen, which has offices in New York and Washington.

"We are ready to go into battle,"

said Bill de Blasio, Mrs. Clinton's campaign manager. "It's a very strong team."

The Clinton campaign also announced the appointment of Ramon Martinez III, a top aide to City Council Speaker Peter F. Vallone, as the campaign's political director. Mr. Martinez, a lawyer, has worked for the Council since 1996.

Ellis Verdi, president of DeVito/Verdi, said his firm was excited. "Any advertising campaign is a challenge, but in this case we are blessed with a great product," he said. "We beat the mayor once before and we plan to beat him again."

Bruce Teitelbaum, the head of Mrs. Giuliani's Senate exploratory committee, referred to the Clintons' many friends in show business and said, "Their team of television producers, ad agencies and spin doctors is just more form over substance. It's like they are gearing up for a production of Hollywood on the Hudson."

DeVito/Verdi has produced politically minded ads for the Pro-Choice Public Education Project, a consortium of abortion rights groups nationwide, and commercials for Planned Parenthood promoting the use of condoms.