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Gov Steps on Brooks' Laff Lines

By Michael Daly

Mel Brooks had just finished telling a joke about three rabbis and a Cadillac when a functionary asked him to join Mayor Bloomberg and Gov. Pataki.

"Okay, the governor, the mayor!" Brooks said. "Big-time!"

Brooks started across the new movie studio at the Brooklyn Navy Yard where he will be shooting a musical remake of "The Producers." The story concerns Max Bialystock and Leo Bloom, who sell 1,000% of a Broadway show about Hitler with the assumption it is sure to flop.

"If there's Bialystock and Bloom, what about Pataki and Bloomberg?" yours truly inquired.

"Pataki and Bloomberg," Brooks said. "We can use that. And they'll sell 1,000% of anything."

Brooks was joking, though not even Bialystock would have contemplated some of the schemes Pataki has cooked up. We were still carrying bodies from Ground Zero when Pataki tried to scam us out of federal aid aimed at preventing another attack. He continues to resist an explicit court order to give city kids their due share of school funding. He recently contrived to cut \$4 million in library funding while quietly pledging to restore the money in districts with Republican legislators.

Still, however many times the governor seeks to cheat the city, the mayor continues to act as if "Pataki & Bloomberg" were stenciled on a glass office door. The mayor clearly believes the city will fare better if he at least pretends the governor is a partner, not a foe.

Bloomberg seems to be right when it comes to moviemaking, anyway. The question to ask when something involves Pataki is what's in it for Pataki, and at least part of the answer became clear as he ascended with Brooks and Bloomberg onto a dais that had been set up in a new studio yesterday morning.

The allure of the movies is too strong for almost anybody to resist, and now here was Pataki, sharing a stage with the great Mel Brooks. A politician who repeatedly has betrayed the city

derided the less expensive locales that have sought to pass themselves off as New York in the movies.

"The cities that have pretended to be New York, but they're not," Pataki said. "Wanna-bes."

The governor-wanna-be-President then reassumed his seat.

"Well done," Brooks said. "Gentile. But he talks nice."

The other half of Pataki & Bloomberg then spoke. The mayor jokingly suggested he might be just the guy to play Bialystock in the movie.

"We wanted somebody a little taller," Brooks said.

"The governor," Bloomberg suggested.

"I've got other plans for him," Brooks said. "John Wayne. A biography."

"There are some people who don't want me to continue in my current career," Bloomberg noted.

"We'll find something for you," Brooks replied.

Brooks continued joking and mugging as if he were still at Public School 19 in Brooklyn. State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver then rose to speak in tones so sonorous as to achieve the seeming impossible: causing the irrepressible Brooks to glaze over.

But Brooks recovered in time for his turn at the podium. He spoke of growing up on South Third St. in Williamsburg and of riding into the magic of Manhattan in his Uncle Joe's cab.

"I had to lie on the floor, since he had the flag up," Brooks said.

He had shot the original "The Producers" in New York and then he had produced a stage version on Broadway, but it had seemed at first that the expense would force him to shoot the remake out of town.

"It was breaking my heart to think we would have to go to Budapest or Toronto or Vancouver to mimic this wonderful city," he said.

The ceremony ended with the governor sitting at a small table to formally sign the bill according the state's share of the tax rebate that will allow "The Producers" to be made in New York.

"Free pens!" Brooks said.

Pataki signed with one of a row of pens and handed it to Brooks, who promptly stuck it in the front pocket of his sports coat. Brooks used to sneak into the Navy Yard as a boy with his buddies Moishe and Benjy to watch warships being built. He would now be making a movie here thanks to one partnership even more improbable than Bialystock & Bloom.