

Newsday

June 11, 2009

Judged by the company you keep

With this alliance, GOP would have been better off waiting for the 2010 election

BY E. CHRISTOPHER MURRAY

As a Long Islander I can't help but be a little happy and relieved that as a result of this week's political maneuvering in Albany, Sen. Dean Skelos (R-Rockville Centre) has re-emerged as the New York State Senate Majority Leader.

But as a New Yorker, I am more than a little disturbed that he accomplished this feat by agreeing to share power with two of the most disreputable Democratic senators, Pedro Espada Jr. and Hiram Monserrate.

The long-feared nightmare for Long Island of what would happen to our region if all three power centers in Albany — the State Senate, Assembly and governorship — were controlled by New York City Democrats seemed to be coming true during this year's legislative session. From the Metropolitan Transportation Authority bailout that imposes a pun-

ishing payroll tax on Long Island (and other) businesses in areas terribly underserved by the agency, to the state's unfair distribution of federal stimulus money from Washington, Long Island was treated poorly. We seemed to have no real voice when decisions were being made that would affect our future in profound ways.

So it is no wonder that the initial reaction by many Long Islanders was positive when Skelos returned to power and the Long Island's Republican Senate delegation's long-held clout to protect our interests was restored. But even with our justified concern as to how Long Island was treated, is this really the best thing for the state?

To regain power, the Senate Republicans made a deal with two Democratic state senators whose ethics and fitness for office are in serious doubt. Sen. Monserrate (D-Jackson Heights) is facing felony criminal charges for allegedly slash-



Dean Skelos, Tom Golisano, Hiram Monserrate and Pedro Espada

ing his girlfriend's face, and the new president pro tempore of the Senate, Sen. Espada (D-Bronx) has consistently failed to comply with campaign finance disclosure requirements. In fact, the Democratic caucus' attempts to discipline these individuals may have been the reason they threw their support behind the Republicans.

This is not a partisan issue — after all, the two senators in question have proudly proclaimed they will remain Democrats. While the Long Island Republican Senate delegation

is held in high regard, Long Islanders should ask if it is really in our region's best interest to have the keys to the Republican control of the State Senate in the hands of two Democratic senators who seem to have problems complying with the law.

The anger Long Island taxpayers are feeling toward Albany this year is understandable, and no doubt throughout the state, Albany's massive increase in spending and taxes during a recession created a sense of despair about the fu-

ture of New York. As a result, going into next year's elections, Republicans had a golden opportunity to propose a new vision of how state government should operate. Unfortunately, this week's power play, while providing the Republican Party with a quick fix, may undermine the party's long-term chances of re-establishing a true two-party system in this now very blue state.

There are many serious issues that the Republican Party can raise during next year's election, about how badly our state and region have fared under one-party rule in Albany. Instead, the Democrats may be able to sidetrack the discussion by tarring the Republicans with the ethical lapses of two Democratic state senators.

The Republican Party would have been better off trusting the voters to restore them to power.



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