

July 11, 2009

EDITORIAL

Now What in Albany?

Another flip-flop by the spectacularly self-serving state senator from the Bronx, Pedro Espada Jr., has now given the Democrats a working majority in the Senate. This means that senators can start doing what they're paid to do: legislate. Their bitter, five-week standoff has already exacted far too high a toll on the lives of New York's citizens and on the state's tattered reputation.

The Senate immediately passed a bunch of mostly noncontroversial bills, showing that it has a pulse. But as far as we — and we suspect most New Yorkers — are concerned, the senators all deserve to be ridden out of town on a rail.

The next election is more than a year away. If this gang wants to change voters' minds, it must fundamentally reform the corrupt system that made this mess inevitable: the disgraceful campaign finances, the safe seats, the lack of transparency. We're not optimistic.

Instead of conceding buffoonery, Democrats tried to pass off their misbehavior as little more than a family feud. Republicans busied themselves with trying to reverse Gov. David Paterson's appointment of Richard Ravitch to fill the vacant post of lieutenant governor.

To recap: Mr. Espada, an ambitious Democrat, had been siding with the Republicans, leaving the Senate in a 31-to-31 tie, depriving it of leadership, crippling state government. That persuaded Mr. Paterson to appoint a lieutenant governor to end the paralysis.

On Thursday, Mr. Espada recanted, putting the Democrats back in the majority and allowing business to resume. Mr. Espada said he was persuaded that the Democrats were committed to changing rules he found unfair. A less charitable explanation was that Mr. Espada feared that one or more factors — Mr. Ravitch's arrival, a power-sharing deal — could leave him out in the cold.

This slippery mediocrity managed to get himself named as majority leader. Self-respecting Democrats must hope that his office turns out to be ceremonial.

The Senate has a lot to do. It needs to extend mayoral control of the New York City school system and legalize same-sex marriage. There is a big hole in the state's budget, which may require a summer session. Beyond that are the even bigger issues of governance like campaign finance reform and equitable redistricting. Until New York has cleaner, more competitive politics, the Pedro Espadas of the world will continue to run Albany, and all New Yorkers will suffer.

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