



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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When Will We Hear from Our Democratic Leaders about Those Senators

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by New York State Senator Reverend Rubén Díaz

Two years ago, Senators Hiram Monserrate, Pedro Espada, Carl Kruger and I formed a group that we called the Four Amigos. We met frequently – not in secret- all believing in transparency in government. We discussed how, as Democrats serving in the Senate Majority, we could initiate much needed change in the Senate to help our constituents. As Senators representing areas with growing Hispanic populations, we knew that our mission was long overdue.

Senator Monserrate’s “parliamentary coup” folded when he returned to vote with the Democratic Party. (As I recall, several key Senators acted like his best friends when they begged him to return, but later they led the charge to throw him out of office.)

Senator John Sampson was subsequently elected to serve as Senate Majority Leader. Senator Espada was selected to serve as the Senate's Temporary President and Acting Lieutenant Governor – the highest-ranking position that any Hispanic has ever achieved in the New York State legislature.

The Four Amigos were branded as traitors, banditos, and extortionists. We were labeled opportunists and thugs. Mayor Ed Koch sat on New York 1 and called us rats. Democratic leaders throughout the state used every chance they could to make public statements attacking us and our intentions. Editorial boards had a field day at our expense, and so did political pundits.

This year, Senators Diane Savino, Jeff Klein, David Carlucci and David Valesky have dubbed themselves the “New Independence Conference” of the New York State Senate. Those Senators have severed formal ties from Senate Majority Leader John Sampson. They refuse to caucus with Senate Democrats. Despite the financial stranglehold around the throats of New Yorkers, and despite the fact that the Democrats are not in the Majority, that self-anointed group of Senators has been granted millions of dollars in perks and budget appropriations for staff, parking spots, etc.

They have been given preferred office space so they can remain tightly-knit and their offices are being re-designed to have walls placed or removed as they desire. After a fair amount of kicking and screaming, those Senators been given the power to decide where they sit in the Senate Chamber. (It was like watching passengers on the Titanic re-arranging deck chairs.) Last night, it was announced that three of those Senators were granted Chairmanship positions (with lulus) by the Republican Majority Leader.

I'm listening hard but I don't hear even a whisper from any Democratic leader of their criticism of those Senators who have abandoned the Democratic Party. Is the snow muffling any outcry? Will the Daily News' Mr. Bramhall render this new caucus as the new Cosa Nostra? Are the actions of Hispanic legislators held to a different, higher standard? Has the Democratic Party decided those non-Hispanic Senators should determine what's best for all New Yorkers with no accountability?

Please don't try to justify the criticism the Four Amigos endured because of Hirman Monserrate's conviction because that didn't happen until many months after the Senate coup. And please do not justify the malicious comments because of Senator

Espada's recent indictment because that wasn't even on the horizon in 2008.

Please, explain this to me because I just don't see how we were wrong and they are right. I don't understand why we were condemned and they are being treated like prima donnas. Please explain to me why the Democratic Leadership in New York State is leaving Senator John Sampson to fight this fight alone?

Is this a double-standard or what?