



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruben Diaz

The Four Amigos, the IDC, and Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito: How things change ... or are they just double standards?

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WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

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You should know that back in 2009, when it came time to elect a new President in the State Senate, there were many candidates for the Democrats to choose from. This was when the Four Amigos – Senators Carl Kruger, Pedro Espada, Hiram

Monseratte, and I – got together and talked about how we could unite to get leadership in the Senate and make a difference.

You should know that at the time, in order for someone to become the Democratic Senate Leader, it required 32 votes, and it was a tight race.

In our planning, the Four Amigos decided what to do about each issue that each Amigo wanted to take care of. Senator Pedro Espada wanted to be the first minority New York State Senate President Pro Tem. Senator Hiram Monseratte wanted to Chair the Senate Consumer Protection Committee. Senator Karl Krueger wanted to Chair the Senate Finance Committee. And I wanted a promise that the gay marriage bill would not come to the Senate Floor for a vote.

Because of our success, the reaction to the Four Amigos was labeled a “coup” and a “scandal.” We were vilified as the “Four Banditos.” We were branded as being traitors, corrupt, blackmailers, thieves, slimy, crooks, extortionists, deadbeats, selfish, greedy, shameful, stooges, clowns, opportunists - and accused us by saying the whole thing was some kind of “quid pro quo.” We were called all kinds of disparaging names. Former New York State Governor David Paterson publicly professed that we were “disingenuous” and that we were engaged in “very nefarious practices.”

As of today, we have not recuperated from those attacks, in part because of the unfortunate personal affairs of my three colleagues – none of which were related to the demands we made in 2009.

Since that time, when another chance arose to elect a new Senate President, a different group of four Senators got together and (copied us) forming what is known as the Senate Independent Democratic Conference – the IDC. The IDC is led by Senator Jeff Klein, and is comprised of three Senators: Diane Savino, David Carlucci, and David Valesky. Their power-grab was formed, they claim, because they were fed up with the “selfish antics” of their leaders.

It is well known that the IDC clearly and openly made political demands, which were met by Republican Senator Dean Skelos, who agreed to share the leadership of the State Senate with Senator Jeff Klein. The IDC Members were given Senate Committee leadership – AND a separate budget containing millions of dollars!

Those four IDC State Senators have been routinely praised for their coup/breakaway. The IDC members have been labeled as progressive leaders, virtuous, smart, bold, power-sharing and thoughtful. They have been commended by unions, by the Governor, by editorial boards and reporters ... almost everybody praises them because of what they did.

Now I am reading a column written by Michael Gartland in the December 29, 2013 edition of New York Post titled, "BLAS A 'MARK' MAN - Council-boss IOUs" casually listing the demands, deals, payouts and "plum paychecks" that are being made in the New York City Council in order for certain concessions to be made so that Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito will get the 31 votes she needs to be in control as the New York City Council Speaker.

According to Mr Gartland, there are many Council Members who have been promised Committee Chairmanships and other fabulous prizes if they vote for Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito to be the Speaker.

For example - and if that happens - Mr. Gartland mentioned how Council Member Julissa Ferreras will get to be the Majority Leader and receive an extra \$23,000; Council Member David Greenfield will get to be the Chair of the Land Use Committee and receive an extra \$18,000; Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer will get to be the Chair of the Finance Committee and receive an extra \$18,000; and either Council Member Danny Dromm or Councilman Ydanis Rodriguez will get to be the Chair of the Education Committee and get an extra \$10,000. If Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito gets to be the the Speaker, she will get an extra \$28,500.

My dear reader, please keep in mind that "Committee chairmanships carry generous taxpayer-funded stipends over and above the \$112,500 base salary council members get annually."

I don't see anybody calling Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito or anyone involved in these dealings crooked or deadbeats - or requesting any investigation about possible ethical wrongdoings, or being accused of engaging in any type of "quid pro quo." On the contrary, outgoing Council Member Lew Fidler is calling this a "standard." He said: "No speaker has taken that job since I was there without discussing committee assignments with possible supporters. This is standard."

Now it is a standard thing for all City Council Members to partake in the practice of "quid pro quo" so Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito can be the Speaker of the

New York City Council and in return, give back to the Council Members whatever they want or demand.

My dear reader, how things have changed!

Are we sure this is now a standard, and not a double standard? How come it was not a standard for Senator Espada, Senator Monserrate, or Senator Kruger to ask for leadership posts? How come it was not a standard for me to ask for the gay marriage not to come to the Senate Floor?

For us, it was considered corruption - but when I read about how Mr. Frank Seddio, the Chair of the Brooklyn Democratic organization is going around and asking and demanding (according to Mr. Gartland's article) that "de Blasio promise his allies several city marshal's jobs" - I have a few questions.

What would have happen if it weren't Kings Democratic Chair Frank Seddio demanding these appointments and political favors, but instead, if Bronx County Democratic Chair Carl Heastie was the one making these demands? I can assure you that everyone under the sun would be calling for an investigation. I can assure you that my very best friends, Gerson Borrero and Bob Kappstatter, along with the editorial boards of El Diario la Prensa and other publications would be accusing Carl Heastie of serious wrongdoing. Where are you guys now? Why are you being so quiet? Where are all of my friends in the media who seeks purity and truth? Where is the outrage about all of the backroom dealings and threats that are going on right now?

I also have to ask myself, what ever happened to Curtis Sliwa who likes to talk about the leadership of Bronx County, and now he is keeping his mouth shut about Mr. Frank Seddio and the Brooklyn Democratic organization? What about Governor Andrew Cuomo's Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE), and what about the Honorable Eric Schneiderman who is New York State's Attorney General? Ladies and gentlemen, where are the subpoenas and the investigations - and the press conferences?

I have to say that, at least to me, that this is much, much worse than what we were accused of doing. And I ask myself: Is this how things have changed ... or is it just a gross case of double standards?

I am State Senator Rev. Rubén Díaz, and this is what you should know.

