

June 10, 2009**EDITORIAL**

Albany's Madhouse

By the time the dysfunctional body that passes for a Legislature in New York State gets through the 2009 session, calling someone an Albany reformer will be an insult. In a display of chutzpah that startled even old political hands, the Senate Republicans and two of the least-reputable Democrats in a deeply disreputable place brazenly declared themselves to be a reform coalition and staged a palace coup against the Democratic majority.

We're still puzzling out how these defections came about and what tawdry promises were made. But make no mistake: Reform and bipartisanship had nothing to do with it. Two weeks until the end of the 2009 session, lawmaking has shuddered to a maddening standstill. The passing of bills, the raising of funds, the discussion of issues have all been put far back on the back burner.

It is worth noting that the befuddled Democratic majority was nothing to wave the flag about. In many ways, it turned out to be almost as bad as the Republicans who ran the Senate for more than 40 years until January. But some Democrats, like Senator Daniel Squadron of Manhattan, were pushing for real changes that would, for example, have started to clean up the campaign finance system. And Gov. David Paterson was trying to push reform that would include some of the first independent oversight of lawmakers.

Republican leaders have their own package, some of which might improve matters in the Senate. But even the better parts of their reform are eclipsed by one slimy act: appointing State Senator Pedro Espada Jr., a Bronx Democrat, as Senate president. If that appointment stands, Mr. Espada would become governor of New York if Mr. Paterson is out of state or incapacitated.

This is the same Mr. Espada who once tried to direct more than \$700,000 of state money to his own nonprofit clinic — a grant that was eventually canceled as an embarrassment by state leaders. That is the same Mr. Espada who asked for \$2 million in state funds this year — a request stalled by Senate Democrats because the money appeared to be going to front groups for the health care organization that he founded.

Add to all that Mr. Espada's repeated failure to reveal his campaign donors and the thousands of dollars in unpaid fines for campaign violations that he still faces. Mr. Paterson has done the right thing — to say the least — by promising not to go out of state for a while.

The other Democrat that Republicans appear to have enticed into their tent is Senator Hiram Monserrate of Queens, who is facing charges that he assaulted his girlfriend by slashing her in the face with a broken glass. New York Republicans have certainly come a long way since Teddy Roosevelt and Nelson Rockefeller.

It is not clear yet how New York's Legislature untangles this mess. On Tuesday, the State Senate gates were locked, and the Democrats were holding onto the keys. Court action loomed, and some in the new

Republican clique were threatening to meet in the hallways.

The real issue, of course, is whether state lawmakers can approve a workable form of mayoral control for New York City schools, whether they can finally give gays and lesbians the right to a marriage license and whether a reform package that once looked promising can finally become real. Right now, it appears that most politicians in Albany are more concerned about defending their turf than improving life and politics in New York State.

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