



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruben Diaz

What You Should Know

RUBEN DIAZ November 8, 2012

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FOR YOUR INFORMATION

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ALBANY — For three of the four Senate Republicans who voted in favor of same-sex marriage last year, it appears there was a political price to pay.

After one announced his retirement months ago and another was defeated in a September primary, Sen. Stephen Saland, R-Poughkeepsie, trails at the ballot box as the focus now turns toward thousands of absentee ballots to be counted in the coming weeks.

Come January, just one of the four -- Sen. Mark Grisanti, R-Buffalo -- is definitely returning to the state capital. Saland's re-election took a severe hit when more than 16,000 votes Tuesday went to a Conservative Party candidate who adamantly opposes the same-sex marriage vote.

"Steve Saland took for granted his base vote," state Conservative Party Chairman Michael Long said Wednesday. "There is a strong conservative Republican voice and base in his Senate district that basically threw their hands up and felt betrayed by him."

Long and the Conservative Party pledged not to support any candidates who favored same-sex unions, in some cases breaking political ties with candidates whom they had previously supported. He made good on the pledge, backing Saratoga County Clerk Kathy Marchione in a successful primary bid against Sen. Roy McDonald, R-Saratoga, and Neil Di Carlo against Saland.

Sen. James Alesi, R-Perinton, Monroe County, announced in May that he would retire

at the end of his term. Alesi's troubles were complicated because he had trespassed on a constituent's property, then tried to sue after he broke his leg. He later withdrew the suit.

Di Carlo, of Brewster, Putnam County, nearly ousted Saland in a closely contested September primary that caught many political operatives by surprise. Di Carlo drew about 14 percent of the vote Tuesday.

Saland trailed Rhinebeck trustee Terry Gipson, a Democrat, by 1,600 votes.

"This is not the final chapter," Saland told supporters late Tuesday. "There are too many people who remain to be heard from and they will be heard from, it's just a question of how long it will take."

Sen. Thomas Libous, R-Binghamton, acknowledged in a radio interview Wednesday that the Conservative Party “caused us some problems” in Saland’s race. Libous heads the Senate Republican Campaign Committee.

“There’s no doubt about it,” Libous said on Talk1300 in Albany. “Obviously the gay marriage vote was something they were principled on.”

Long took issue with the idea that his party was to blame for Saland’s potential downfall.

“It wasn’t Neil Di Carlo that did this to Steve Saland,” Long said. “It was Steve Saland that did this to himself.”

Nathan Schaefer, executive director of the Empire State Pride Agenda, said Saland’s support of same-sex marriage ultimately did not hurt his re-election efforts. He pointed to Sean Patrick Maloney, an openly gay Democrat who was elected to Congress on Tuesday in a district that overlaps much of Saland’s.

“I don’t think it was the vote for same-sex marriage that cost Steve Saland the election,” Schaefer said. “There was an overwhelmingly popular Democratic president (Barack Obama) up for re-election, and that had a dramatic influence on the way voters voted in that region.”

The political fallout could have a major impact of the balance of the state Senate. Of the four districts represented by the Republicans who voted for same-sex marriage, two were held by the GOP on Tuesday.

Alesi’s district flipped to Democrats, with Monroe County Legislator Ted O’Brien, D-Irondequoit, besting Assemblyman Sean Hanna, R-Mendon. If Gipson is victorious, it would likely give Democrats a majority of the votes in the 63-seat chamber.