



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jose M. Serrano

Bow Tie Leading Capitol Fashion Revolution

JOSÉ M. SERRANO May 28, 2013



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(Albany, NY) - There's a revolution stirring in the Senate's Democratic conference, led by Jose M. Serrano. It involves neckwear.

Starting earlier this year, the upper Manhattan senator began to replace the long ties that are part of the generally accepted uniform for male lawmakers, aides and lobbyists with a colorful selection of more traditional cravats. He had turned 40 and lost more than 60 pounds.

Call it a reboot, a midlife crisis, or maybe, as Serrano puts it, he just "wanted to try something new." But the lawmaker has updated his official head shot and changed his Senate website to feature a bow-tied portrait. He says he no longer dons long ties.

"Bow ties look better," Serrano said. "The long neckties can look a little sloppy. ... I think you're going to see more members coming this way."

It's starting to catch on. Particularly on Tuesdays, the peak day for Capitol activity during the legislative session, more people are opting for bow ties. Sens. Bill Perkins and Kevin Parker are regular participants, and male aides — usually younger men employed in an increasingly rare place where dress clothes are regularly required — are following their lead.

Perkins, D-Harlem, even taught his legislative director, Tom Briggs, how to tie one.

"It's become a staff unity thing," he said. "People say they'll wear a black bow tie for a formal occasion — what's more formal than going into the Senate chamber?"

Perhaps it's a stretch, then, to cast Serrano as a revolutionary. Bow ties have their roots in the garb of 17th-century Croatian mercenaries, and are still a staple of formal tuxedos (think James Bond). Wayne Lair, a lobbyist, informally claims to have started the bow tie trend in 2007, and says he now "switches it up." Many interviewees said bow ties are stereotypically more Republican (think Tucker Carlson), but Democrats have led the way at the Capitol.

Indeed, a bow tie bonanza seems to have come and gone in the Democrat-dominated state Assembly. Wayne Jackson, the chamber's longtime sergeant at arms, was once a devotee. Several years ago, dozens of members put on the ties in solidarity and posed for a picture. For some, it was too much.

"It made me look like Howdy Doody," said Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi, D-Queens.

Ah, the Pee-wee Herman principle.

Others explained their preference for long ties on how the accessory matches their physique. Also cited: the combination of an aversion to clip-ons and an inability to knot a bow tie by hand. "I've never felt sufficiently Churchillian to do it in session," explained Assemblyman Chuck Lavine, D-Long Island.

"If it's later in the session, I don't want to wear a bow tie because it will accentuate my stomach," said Assemblyman Joe Lentol, D-Brooklyn, noting the often-slack health habits of lawmakers separated from their families.

Some legislators will rotate them in, including Assemblyman Michael Benedetto, D-Bronx. He took to bow ties when working as a maitre d', and said he'd love to see more people wear them.

"What you need is somebody in a high public place to start a new trend," he said. "I would like to see the governor in a bow tie, preferably with polka dots. Maybe it could signal the end of session in June."

Normally the governor favors soft-colored ties with a small, often New-York-themed print. His spokesman declined to comment.