



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Once Again, Our Community Has Been Double-Crossed By Our Leaders

RUBEN DIAZ February 10, 2014

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

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You should know that in one of my previous columns, A Democratic Gimmick on the “Dream Act”: Do Nothing and Blame the Republicans, I wrote: “there are some members of the Legislature that say one thing back in the City and to the Hispanic media and then say and do something quite different when they return to Albany, or when the Governor calls them.”

You also should know that it is not only Governor Andrew Cuomo who is able to have public officials from our community agree to something in private, and then do another thing in public. Now, New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman is using these same tactics to destroy the Puerto Rican Day Parade, and making sure that our annual day to celebrate our amazing Puerto Rican pride is ruined.

I have learned that Attorney General Eric Schneiderman has been calling for private meetings and meeting with some of New York's Hispanic elected officials to discuss his plans to remove all of the National Puerto Rican Day Parade's Board Members, and put political lackeys in their place. I promise you that as soon as I can verify who these double-crossers are and as soon as I get the names of these elected officials from our community who have been secretly meeting with New York State's Attorney General, I will provide transparency in government and let my readers know.

You should know that the double-crossings of our elected officials in our own community are an ugly part of New York's history. One example of these double-crossings has been documented in former New York Mayor Edward I. Koch's book, "Mayor," in the chapter he called "Minorities: Confronting the Issues." Mayor Koch wrote about the city-wide Puerto Rican Community Development Project (PRCDP), a program that helped many Puerto Ricans who came to New York to live. As a matter of fact, I was a beneficiary of the PRCDP: it created the opportunity for me to attend and proudly graduate from Herbert H. Lehman College!

The Puerto Rican Community Development Project (PRCDP) was an organization created by our Puerto Rican pioneers back in the 1960's, to help, protect, defend and promote the Puerto Rican and every other Hispanic who came to New York City.

You should know that because Puerto Ricans were the first to come and its leaders were the ones fighting the struggle to get ahead, Puerto Rican were blamed for every violation of the law and every wrongdoing committed by Hispanics regardless of their nationality, as long as they were Hispanic they were all called Puerto Rican.

Those were really bad times for us Puerto Ricans. Some of our leaders led by Ramon S. Velez, Dr. Evelina Antonetti, Carmen Arroyo, George Rodriguez, Federico Perez, Dr. Amalia

Betances, Gilberto Gerena Valentin, Joe Erazo, Rev. Ruben Dario Colon, Manny Diaz, Aramis Gomez, Marina Brook, Felicia Lemus, Petra Allende and many others created the PRCDP.

Mayor Koch wrote about his decision to close the PRCDP, citing a trip to Albany he made on March 6, 1977:

"During the County Day ceremony I was attending in Albany, I spoke to José Serrano, an Assemblyman from the South Bronx. I asked Serrano about PRCDP, and Serrano too told me that the program should be closed."

In that same chapter, he wrote about how the following morning, former U.S. Congressman Herman Badillo was quoted in El Dario la Preens attacking Koch's Deputy Mayor, Haskell Ward, for orchestrating the closing of the PRDCP, calling Ward "negligent and incompetent."

That chapter also documents how José Serrano, the same person who told Mayor Koch to close the PRCDP, signed an open letter that was published in that same edition of El Diario la Prensa criticizing the closing of the PRCDP.

What hypocrisy!

Mayor Koch, extremely disappointed with José Serrano, wrote what happened next:

"So I called up Serrano and said, "Yesterday we had a conversation. Let me repeat what I said, and if I am incorrect and didn't understand you, tell me. Didn't you say to me that you thought PRCDP should be closed? And that you approved of what we were doing there?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "Well, then, why did you add your name to the press statement in which you agreed with Herman Badillo's denunciation of Haskell Ward?"

He said, "When did I do that?"

I said, "Well, let me read it to you." And I read him the letter that he had signed that had appeared in El Diario. "

My dear reader, this is exactly why our community has never been strong. Too often, our elected officials say something and then go behind our backs and say - and do - something else. Mayor Ed Koch's story about José Serrano happened when José Serrano was a State Assemblymember from the South Bronx, but this story is still happening today - with more elected officials, meeting behind closed doors and trying to destroy the National Puerto Rican Day Parade.

When Mayor Koch was the Mayor, José Serrano (who is now a U.S. Congressman) sold us out, and we did not learn. Today, Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and public officials from our community meet with him behind closed doors to decide the fate of our Puerto Rican Day Parade (which is less than 4 months away) and we in the Puerto Rican community are being double-crossed by our elected officials, once again.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have to ask myself, what will it take before our community is strong enough to believe that we also deserve transparency and accountability? When will we say "Enough!" to anyone - especially those among us - who think they can double-cross our people?

I pray and hope that Attorney General Eric Schneiderman follows former Mayor Edward I. Koch's example and can be forthright enough to publicly state and release the names of those elected officials who have been meeting with him to destroy and discredit our national pride, the and National Puerto Rican Day Parade. And I hope that Congressman Serrano is not one of them.

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