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Monserrate Loses Bid to Regain Seat



James Estrin/The New York Times

Former Senator Hiram Monserrate after polls closed in Jackson Heights, Queens for the special election for his former seat.

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[Hiram Monserrate](#), who was expelled from the State Senate after being convicted of assaulting his companion, was handily defeated on Tuesday by José R. Peralta in a special election in Queens for Mr. Monserrate's former seat.

The victory was not unexpected given the level of organized Democratic support for Mr. Peralta, an assemblyman from Queens. Mr. Peralta also had a huge financial advantage over Mr. Monserrate, who ran as an independent and tried to persuade voters to give him another chance to represent them in Albany.

Still, the election followed a fierce, if brief, campaign in which a debate over [same-sex marriage](#), which Mr. Peralta favors and Mr. Monserrate opposes, often overshadowed discussions on issues that are vital to many of the largely Hispanic district's working-class and immigrant residents, like affordable health care and school overcrowding.

With 94 percent of the vote counted, unofficial returns from the overwhelmingly Democratic 13th State Senate District showed Mr. Peralta with 66 percent and Mr.

Monserrate with 27 percent. The Republican candidate, Robert Beltrani, an administrative law judge, came in third with 7 percent.

“Tonight we put an end to dysfunction,” Mr. Peralta told a crowd at a restaurant in East Elmhurst. “Our nightmare is over.”

Just after 10 p.m., Mr. Monserrate arrived to deliver his concession speech at a restaurant in Jackson Heights, where about 50 supporters had gathered. Before he walked in, he said: “We fought a hard-fought fight. It’s a testament to our community that we pulled 4,000 votes. What we showed here is that there’s an alternative to politics as usual in Queens.” He did not rule out running for office in the future.

As far as special elections go, this one drew unusual attention, a sizable turnout and intense passion because of the circumstances surrounding it. The leading contenders were once close political allies and were competing for a Senate seat that became vacant on Feb. 9 when Mr. Monserrate became the first Albany lawmaker removed from office since the 1920s.

The heightened interest was evident by the number of reporters at the Renaissance Charter School in Jackson Heights, where Mr. Peralta and Mr. Monserrate voted an hour apart.

One poll worker, Monica Lafaye, who was assigned to Public School 89 in Elmhurst, said of the number of voters, “It’s been very busy for a special election.”

Mr. Monserrate, 42, a former city councilman and police officer, waged a bare-bones campaign to regain his seat, operating out of a storefront headquarters on a somewhat hidden street corner in Corona and relying on a handful of volunteers to court voters until Election Day. He had no paid staff members; his unpaid campaign manager doubled as scheduler, spokesman and recordkeeper.

Mr. Peralta, meanwhile, had a virtual army of outside supporters at his disposal, including union members, women’s rights groups and gay activists, among them members of Fight Back New York, a well-financed political action committee that works to oust state senators who oppose same-sex marriage and put Mr. Monserrate first on its list.

Mr. Peralta, 37, who was first elected to the Assembly in 2002, also had the backing of the Queens County [Democratic Party](#). That alone gave him a great advantage over Mr. Monserrate, whom the party endorsed in 2008, when he was elected to the Senate.

Mr. Peralta, the son of Dominican parents, graduated from [Queens College](#) and then made his first foray into public service, serving as a community liaison to the State Assembly in western Queens.

If same-sex marriage became the main point of contention during the campaign, it seemed that the candidates' character mattered more to many voters in the district, which includes Jackson Heights, East Elmhurst and Corona.

Some of them said they forgave Mr. Monserrate for his conviction, adding that the offense was a mistake by someone who had done much to help the community.

"You go to his office and he helps," José Díaz, 70, a retired city worker who lives in Corona, said as he left a polling station at Public School 19 on Roosevelt Avenue.

Others, though, said Mr. Monserrate's actions made him unfit to represent the district. Mr. Monserrate "is not a good example for our children," said Pedro Duran, 59, a pastry decorator who also cast his ballot at P.S. 19.

The heated rhetoric that characterized the campaign carried over into Election Day. Outside a polling station at Public School 127 in East Elmhurst, a supporter of Mr. Peralta taunted a Monserrate supporter, calling Mr. Monserrate a "wife beater." The supporter fired back, "It wasn't his wife." (Mr. Monserrate was convicted in October of misdemeanor assault after dragging his companion, Karla Giraldo, through the lobby of his apartment building during an argument. On Monday, Ms. Giraldo lent him her support in a video posted on YouTube.)

Mr. Monserrate, meanwhile, stopped at a senior citizens' center in Corona that served as a polling site. Apparently ignoring election rules that prohibit candidates from campaigning within 100 feet of polling stations, he walked in, shook hands with the men, hugged the women and danced salsa with students taking a class until the center's director persuaded him to leave.