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A joint statement from NY's two main tenant rights and affordable housing coalitions



TENANT MOVEMENT BLASTS SENATE COUP; PUSHES FORWARD WITH AGENDA

The tenant movement in New York is outraged by the June 8 power grab by two turncoats “Democratic” Senators to regain control of the New York State Senate for the Republicans.

Tenant leaders and advocates believe that these events were part of an effort by Senators Pedro Espada and Hiram Monserrate, as well as their Republican allies, to block pro-tenant legislation from being passed in the Senate this legislative session.

One of the central debates in the Senate that led to this attempted power grab was the tenant movement’s progress towards passage of S2237A, which would repeal vacancy decontrol, a provision in the rent laws which allows apartments to be taken out of rent regulation and converted to market rate housing. Vacancy decontrol is currently resulting in the loss of at least 20,000 units of affordable housing every year, accelerating the affordable housing crisis during a punishing economic downturn. Vacancy decontrol has led to widespread tenant harassment throughout New York City and the suburban counties as landlords attempt to remove tenants from their apartments, deregulate them, and increase the rents.

Senator Espada, Chair of the Housing Committee, had indicated that S2237A would be on the June 9 Housing Committee agenda. Representatives of the tenant movement had been promised by Senator Hiram Monserrate that he secured a commitment from Senator Espada to vote the bill out of committee and to vote for the bill when it came to the floor. The recent developments in the Senate will almost certainly hurt tenants’ efforts to ensure that important pro-tenant legislation will come to the floor for a vote this legislative session.

Monday’s events have led to widespread outrage in the tenant movement, which has been working for nearly four decades to help pro-tenant Senators regain control of the State Senate. Tenants had believed that pro-tenant legislation that is both so critical and so urgent would finally be passed this legislative session, with a Democratic majority in power. Instead, tenants have been betrayed at the eleventh hour by the very legislators they helped to elect.

The apparent coup d’etat was orchestrated by moneyed interests and their allies in the State Senate. Rochester billionaire Tom Golisano has been credited with helping Espada, Monserrate, and the Republicans strategize their takeover. And Joseph Strasburg of the Rent Stabilization Association was recently quoted saying “we’re pleasantly thrilled.” Once again, such interests have thwarted the democratic process and the will of New York’s voters.

“The legislators who have orchestrated this revolt are putting tenants’ rights and affordable housing in jeopardy. This is unacceptable; our elected officials must be accountable to their tenant constituents who helped them get elected and who have been counting on them to do the right thing,” said Maggie Russell-Ciardi, Executive Director of the New York State Tenants & Neighbors Coalition.

Tenants are planning actions in the districts to express their outrage and ask their Senators to do the right thing.

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