



### Keep your promise, Pedro: Espada must use his power to pass farm-worker bill

Tuesday, September 8, 2009

If Bronx state Sen. Pedro Espada wants to prove he's not all bad - that he's more than a scheming, sleazy opportunist - he will deliver a historic vote for farmworkers on Thursday.

Espada has said he wants a long-overdue farmworkers' rights bill put on the Senate calendar for that day.

He has promised to lead on an issue that has been crying out for a legislative champion.

Last month, confronting an upstate duck farmer over squalid working conditions faced by his employees, Espada yelled, "We're going to pass a law!" The time has come for him to make good on his pledge.

Espada traveled to Sullivan County - with video cameras and reporters in tow, including a member of the Daily News Editorial Board - in a ploy to rehabilitate an image that had sunk to just north of cockroach level.

He is, after all, the guy who almost singlehandedly paralyzed the Senate for a month by betraying his fellow Democrats to back a Republican coup and then double-crossing the GOP.

Who has flouted campaign finance laws for a decade.

Who faces investigation for allegedly diverting resources from his Medicaid clinics into his political campaign.

Who claims to live in the Bronx while obviously keeping house in Mamaroneck, Westchester County.

Who tried to install his son in a six-figure Senate job.

Who was just forced to fire his deputy chief of staff, Onix Sosa, after he was outed as a notorious slumlord and key figure in a City Council corruption scandal.

Who typifies the "where's mine?" attitude that has become a pox on state government.

Be that as it may, Espada has seized on a worthy cause near and dear to The News - that of fair treatment for the overworked, underpaid men and women whose backbreaking labor puts food on our tables.

Shamefully excluded from basic labor protections, farmworkers are denied rights that other working New Yorkers take for granted - the right to overtime pay, the right to days off, the right to bargain collectively for decent wages and benefits.

A bill to correct this injustice has repeatedly passed the Assembly - and should easily muster a majority in the Senate, if leaders put aside wrongheaded opposition from farm-country members and bring it to a vote.

Espada can break that logjam if he takes on the job with the same cunning and fervor he brought to winning himself power. If he has a principled or serious bone in his body.

He must do what he said he would. Or farmworkers will join the long list of New

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