

VOTING BOTH WAYS IN NY

November 4, 1998



Mitchell L. Moss, Henry Hart Rice Professor of Urban Policy at New York University and Director of NYU's Taub Urban Research Center, examines the defeat of Senator Al D'Amato in a state that re-elected most incumbents.

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A good year for incumbents, mostly.

Voters in New York State re-elected incumbent Republican Governor George Pataki while rejecting Republican Senator Alfonse D'Amato's bid for a fourth term. Congressman Charles Schumer defeated D'Amato in a hard-fought contest for the U.S. Senate that cost more than \$30 million. In the two other statewide races, Democratic Comptroller H. Carl McCall easily won reelection while the race for Attorney-General is so close that the result will not be determined until the absentee ballots are counted next week. Schumer's victory over D'Amato was built around strong support from female voters, especially college graduates who favored the prochoice Schumer over D'Amato who has opposed abortions and was the candidate of the Right-to-Life Party. In addition, Schumer won four out of five Black and Latino votes and won three out of four Jewish votes.

D'Amato, who outspent Schumer in the campaign, spent most of his time attacking Schumer, for being too liberal and for missing congressional votes, charges that Schumer easily refuted and that voters did not believe. Despite the fact that D'Amato has been effective in obtaining federal government funds for New York State projects, his campaign failed to emphasize the way in which his aggressive advocacy had been an asset for New York State.

The Schumer candidacy benefitted by the strong and enthusiastic support of President and Mrs Clinton as well as Vice-President Al Gore. During the final week of the campaign, Mrs. Clinton travelled several times to New York to help attract media attention and funds for Schumer and Vice-President Gore campaigned with Schumer on the Sunday before the election. Clearly, defeating D'Amato, who chaired a Senate committee that

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investigated the Clintons, was a high priority for the White House.

Although the Republican Party in New York State has a strong organizational structure to bring their voters to the polls, the Democrats were also effective in mounting an effective effort to mobilize voters. More than 200,000 telephone calls were made to Democratic Party voters urging them to support Schumer and the Democratic ticket. Many of these telephone calls relied on automated systems that played a pre-recorded message from President Bill Clinton. In addition, two major unions, the United Federation of Teachers and District Council 1199 which represents workers in the health care industry, waged an aggressive campaign on behalf of the Democratic Party, urging their members to support Schumer over D'Amato.

Across New York State, incumbents running for local office were quite successful, and as a result, the State government will remain firmly split with Republicans controlling the State Senate and the Democrats controlling the State Assembly. Peter Vallone, the defeated Democratic candidate for Governor, remains a powerful force as Speaker of the City Council of New York, and as a potential candidate for Mayor of New York City in 2001. Vallone, ran a respectable campaign, but was unable to raise sufficient funds to seriously challenge the incumbent Pataki, whose has been able to reduce taxes while also increasing public support for schools and the environment.

The Clinton Presidency benefits strongly by the results in New York State. With the defeat of D'Amato, one of the President's most vocal critics has been removed from public office, and the Republicans will not be able to have enough votes in the U.S. Senate to override Presidential vetos. Vice-President Al Gore, who campaigned for Schumer in predominantly Latino areas of the Bronx, will also benefit should he seek the Presidency in 2000.

The election of 1998 demonstrates that New York State voters are quite discriminating when they vote. They do not vote for a political party, but for the specific person, as reflected in the success of Democrats Charles Schumer and Carl McCall, and the re-election of a popular Republican Governor, George Pataki. Unlike D'Amato or Dennis Vacco, the Republican Attorney-General, Pataki is prochoice and supports abortion; as a result, he is able to win female votes in New York State. Clearly, the Republican Party in New York State cannot win when they run antiabortion candidates who cannot attract women voters.

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