

# Women of El Barrio

## OPEN LETTER TO EL BARRIO/EAST HARLEM

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When we vote we expect that the person elected to public office understands his/her primary responsibility is to represent the best interests of the district and the people who live there.

Unfortunately, the sentiment among voters and non-voters alike is that more often than not elected officials choose to do what is right for them and not the community they have been elected to represent. Many view elected officials as wheelers and dealers striking backroom deals intended to benefit their political future with little or no regard as to what is best for the people who live in their respective district. Unfortunately, in East Harlem, we have seen this pattern endlessly repeat itself. Every budget cycle government funds are allocated but we have seen our elected officials do very little to assure that we get our fair share.

This year we have a chance to begin to change all that and again, our elected officials chose to act as self-interested politicians rather than as our representatives. Our long-term State Senator, Olga Méndez, re-registered as a Republican. The community came together and reached consensus behind one of several persons expressing interest in running in the September 2004 Democratic Party Primary Election. At a public meeting held Saturday, May 22nd we were pleased to hear both State Senator David Paterson and Congressman Charles Rangel vow to hold back a power grab by the Bronx Democratic Party by waiting to make an official endorsement until he heard from the community.

The East Harlem community took him at his word. All candidates were invited and interviews held with those who accepted our invitation—candidate José Serrano did not accept our invitation. Residents of the area made calls to Congressman Rangel's office. Letters signed by East Harlem residents were mailed to both Rangel and Paterson. The people spoke and joined to support one candidate—East Harlem candidate Nelson Antonio Denis. Even the candidate who had originally been supported by the Manhattan Democratic Party, John Ruiz, has withdrawn from the race and endorsed Nelson Antonio Denis.

To our great surprise, we have learned that all East Harlem's elected officials have chosen to ignore the call for unity and consensus that resulted from that challenge they had put forth to their constituents on that morning of May 22nd. Each and every one—Congressman Rangel, State Senator Paterson, Councilmember Reed, and our District Leaders--have endorsed the Bronx Democratic Party candidate. Not one of our elected officials is willing to say publicly how they arrived at their decision. Instead, it is becoming apparently clear that they chose to hand East Harlem's future over to the Bronx Democratic Party machine for unknown reasons and not for what is in the best interest for East Harlem and its people.

Our next State Senator must be a person of integrity, ability, experience and commitment to the people of East Harlem and the South Bronx. The nominee of the Democratic Party must be the most qualified of those running and the one most able to beat the Republican candidate. We will not allow our future to be brokered by those who have ignored our needs for too long. The community at large and East Harlem in particular must be the ones to make the final decision.