

Second-Longest Running Show Now on Broadway is Uptown

by {ga=ahumm}

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Photo of voters in Washington Heights/Andy Humm

NEW YORK — The second-longest running show now on Broadway is not in the Theatre District, but uptown in Washington Heights.

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In this sliver of a neighborhood on Manhattan's upper Upper West Side, Broadway is the high street in the Dominican American community — and there hasn't been a curtain call in over two decades on the rivalry between Guillermo Linares and Adriano Espaillat since both ran for City Council in 1991.

Linares won to become among the first Dominicans elected to public office in the U.S.

El Diario/La Prensa columnist Roberto Perez calls this rivalry “the Washington Heights version of the Hatfields and the McCoys.” He also wrote that their late August debate at the Hamilton Heights Social Club Los Bravos “felt more like a cockfight arena than a forum.”

On Thursday, Sept. 13, the two men square off against each other in yet another Democratic primary — this time for the state Senate seat that Espaillat holds.

[Linares](#) gave up a run for his Assembly seat to seek the Senate seat that Espaillat was giving up to challenge incumbent Charles B. Rangel in the newly-drawn and newly Latino-majority 15th U.S. Congressional District.

Rangel, with Linares' support, won that race by a hair — just 990 votes — in a rare June primary that was rattled by questions over the balloting. Following his loss, Espaillat decided to try to keep his Senate seat in the separate September primary. (Full disclosure: I did some work last spring writing campaign literature for the Rangel campaign.)

[The new 31st State Senate District](#) hugs the east bank of the Hudson like Chile does the Pacific, covering Inwood to Hell's Kitchen (with a few blocks of Chelsea thrown in) — but its heart is still Dominican Washington Heights.

It had been Eric Schneiderman's district until he ran successfully for state Attorney General in 2010 when Espaillat won a three-way primary for it.

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[Espaillat](#) has the distinction of being the first Dominican American elected to the State Assembly in 1996, knocking off longtime incumbent Brain Murtaugh in a primary.

He also fended off a strong challenge from Miguel Martinez, a former ally, in 2008. (Martinez served in the City Council from 2002-09, when he resigned amidst a conspiracy scandal in which he was ultimately convicted.)

[Linares](#) served in the Council from his historic election in 1991 until he was term-limited out in the 2001 election. He was appointed by Mayor Bloomberg as Commissioner of Immigrant Affairs in 2004, where he served until taking the Assembly seat that Espaillat gave up to run for the state Senate.

Bloomberg pledged to back Linares' current campaign by raising \$100,000 for him.

Espaillat and Linares [debated on Manhattan Neighborhood Network on September 4](#) . In the debate sponsored by the League of Women Voters, they tended to agree on most issues, while attacking each other over their commitment to stronger rent laws and the failure of the state to adopt nonpartisan redistricting this year.

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Espailat said, “I believe very strongly this primary [by Linares] is being bankrolled by the landlord interests. My opponent has received \$40,000 from the landlord lobby to push me out.” Linares did not dispute the donation.

On tenant issues, Linares said that as a City Council Member in 1997 he “was one of the few who stood up to the Speaker to prevent vacancy decontrol,” which was approved in the Assembly with Espailat’s vote and virtually every other pro-tenant member as part of the renewal of the rent laws that the Republican Senate would allow only in that weakened form.

Espailat takes credit for getting the rent laws renewed in 2012. “For the first time, we were able to pass slight improvements,” he said.

Linares told Gotham Gazette that, as landlords try to renew their [J-51 tax break this year](#) , he will insist on “strengthening of the rent laws and eliminating vacancy decontrol” as part of the bargain.

Nevertheless, Tenants PAC, which endorses candidates based on their commitment to tenants’ rights, is going with Espailat in this race, calling him “a major player in the fight for stronger rent laws and the preservation of affordable rental housing.”

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