

Linda Wins!

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The news from Boston: After winning his tenth term as State Senator in the First Suffolk District, Jack Hart resigned, taking a job at a law firm. Many observers considered him in line to become the President of the Senate when the current President, Therese Murray, steps down due to term limits.

Hart was best known as host of the annual Saint Patrick's Day breakfast, an honorary role bestowed upon the State Senator from South Boston. He, and his seat, represent quintessential Boston Irish politics. His predecessor was Steve Lynch, the conservative Democratic Congressman from Massachusetts, and Lynch's predecessor was Billy Bulger, former President of the Senate, and brother of the notorious Whitey Bulger. All of them had risen through the ranks, from State Representative to State Senator, and beyond.

It was expected that Nick Collins, a former aid to Hart, and now serving as State Representative from South Boston, would run for, and most likely win, the seat. It is the way things are done. Hart's resignation was a surprise to some, but certainly not to those on the inside of his political family. Had he wanted the seat to be truly open, he would have resigned in time for the the Democratic primary election to be held on its regular date. Primary elections have low turnout anyway, but by resigning at such a time to force a special primary, Hart guaranteed an even lower voter participation, and thus that his favorite son would most likely win.

It did not turn out that way. Linda Dorcena Forry, daughter of Haitian immigrants, State Representative from the other end of the district, decided to enter the race. Her district was not without its Boston Irish history. Tom Finnerman, former Speaker of the House, held the seat for many years before being forced out because of some "misstatements" concerning the 2001 redistricting negotiations. And though Forry is black, her husband is part of the Dorchester Irish culture, whose family publishes of the local but widely read, Dorchester Reporter.

Forry squeaked by, with only a plurality of votes in the three way contest, beating Collins by 378 of the nearly 22,000 cast. She was undoubtedly aided by the entry into the race of the third candidate, from South Boston, Maureen Dahill, who received over 1,500 votes. Turnout was certainly aided for this primary by the fact that it was also the primary for the US Senate seat, between Congressmen Markey and Lynch, but, clearly, as I will show, for this district, Lynch was able to mobilize his base in a way that strengthened Collins' candidacy.

Forry is my State Representative. I have met her several times, and find her competent, intelligent, and interested in constituent services. All these are positives to me. In Massachusetts politics, especially in those districts such as mine which are doggedly democratic, other characteristics are more important, such as loyalty to the machine, and showing up at least apparently sober at ceremonial events. My prejudice is to vote against such candidates, and vote for those who demonstrate qualities similar to those of Forry.

To help her campaign, I did a quick analysis of the district, to see which of the precincts she concentrate on to get out the vote. Using the data from the 2008 Presidential and 2010 special US Senate election, Brown/Coakley, and the recently released 2010 Census data, by precinct, for population over 18 and black population over 18, I prepared a table of those precincts which had shown the greatest drop off of participation between the two elections.

Overall, the vote had gone down from 65,000 ballots cast to 41,000 ballots, but each precinct had, of course, a percentage of participation of those surmised to be eligible, that is, over 18. [This is not registered voters, but the entire population, and this figure did not take into account that some residents are ineligible to vote for a variety of reasons, including citizenship. It was used to give a rough indicator what kind of yield could be expected if a voter turnout drive were concentrated in a particular precinct.] I presumed that, since I was comparing the Obama campaign to the Coakley campaign, the Forry campaign, for a number of reasons, might best emulate the Obama campaign, especially since the turnout for the election which Forry won was, as happened, only a third of that for the Presidential race.

Race matters. It is no news that black participation in electoral politics is substantially below that of white participation. In fact, it was news when, for the 2012 Presidential race, Black participation rates were higher than that of White. One more thing about race: this particular district is "integrated" in that a third of the population identifies as black. It is also integrated in the sense that, except for the cluster of ten precincts which are overwhelmingly white, less than 1% black, mainly located in South Boston, the racial composition of the precincts evenly spans a spectrum up to 90% black. Most precincts are truly integrated, [neither all white, nor all black].

Using the electoral data from this district, and the Census data, I calculated correlation coefficients for the relationship between participation, that is ballots cast divided by population over 18, and black population over 18. Pearson's r is the better known, but, because it presumes that the underlying data structure is normally distributed, I also calculate Kendall's tau, a non-parametric, rank order correlation coefficient. Since I am using the entire universe of data, that is all the precincts, I need not worry about margin of error, or other probability issues. My numbers represent the world as it is.

In 2008, the correlation between black population over 18 and voter participation was a Pearson's r of -.11 and a Kendall's tau of -.18. This means that black participation was correlated negatively, slightly negatively, with turnout. Social scientists would say that my hypothesis is confirmed. I say that the confirmation is so slight as to be questionable.

In 2010, the correlation between black population over 18 and voter participation was a Pearson's r of -.43 and a Kendall's tau of -.41. Both social scientists and I would say that the hypothesis of lower black participation is confirmed. These are robust numbers. My guess, from previous studies I and others have done, is that black participation increases when there is a black candidate on the ballot, [just as evangelical participation would seem to increase when there is an evangelical candidate on the ballot]. Thus, Obama galvanized the black vote in Boston in 2008, and Romney failed to galvanize the evangelical vote nationwide in 2012.

Forry, being black, and running against the white Irish machine in the First Suffolk Senate district, would have to rally the black vote. Did she? First, she would need to simply get the vote out. This is why I had given her the list of precincts on which to concentrate. For participation, based on population of voters over 18 divided by ballots cast, and the vote for Forry, Pearson's r was -.51 and Kendall's tau of -.45. This means that, while she won, she failed to mobilize the vote in those precincts where participation was low. She won in spite of a participation rate similar to what Obama achieved.

Did she capture the Black vote? Most certainly. Pearson's r of +.92 and Kendall's tau of +.94 demonstrated an iron clad association between the black vote and support for Forry. The differences between these last two sets of correlations demonstrate her campaign's failure to get out the vote in those precincts most likely to support her. She did win, but she would have lost, had it been a two person race.

The chart below summarizes these findings:

	Black Participation		Correlations	
		Pearson's r		Kendall's tau
Obama		-0.12		-0.18
Coakley		-0.43		-0.41
Forry		-0.51		-0.45

It is clear from this data that black participation rates were higher for Coakley, with her lackluster campaign, than for Forry. Perhaps this is an artifact of the much higher total vote; perhaps it is an indicator of an inept "on the ground" campaign effort. My hope is that it was the former. More on that later.

Finally, was she really running against the white Irish machine, that had elected Bulger, Lynch, Hart, and presumably Collins to this safe seat. Most definitely, for the correlation between the vote for Lynch, running in a different race, for US Senate, but on the same ballot, are striking: Pearson's r of -.94 and Kendall's tau of -.94. Correlation coefficients like these, in social science literature, are so rare they equal the likelihood of the sun rising tomorrow.

She beat the machine, but just barely. 374 votes out of 22,000. A plurality, not a majority. It took Collins, who probably expected to be anointed as State Senator, a couple of days to accept these results, and not press for a recount. In the end, I am pretty sure everyone agreed that Linda would make a good State Senator, represent all the people of her district, and do a magnificent job hosting next year's Saint Patrick's Day breakfast, in South Boston, Massachusetts.

Symbolically, this is a big change, and a change to be celebrated. But it is not a change of

substance. A change of substance would be change in employment rates, incarceration rates, education attainment, child mortality, and crime statistics. This morning, shopping at Lambert's Rainbow Fruit, in Dorchester, I said hello to Billy Lambert. I think he and his brother own the place, and their parents started it, but I see him a lot in the vegetable aisle, gleaning the produce, working on the floor. He asked me how I was doing, and I told him, "Really good. That I had had a tough time a few years ago, but now things were really good." He told me, in grotesque detail, of how things were really bad for one of his customer's families, whose wife, a librarian was blind in one eye, and perhaps blind in another, whose daughter had lost one leg and might lose another, whose son was dead, and who was now deaf in both ears, because of the Marathon bombing. My day had just gone south.

I stood there speechless, and then suggested that the only good thing I could think of is that we live in a country where such events are most rare. He heard me. He said that stuff like this happens all over the world, and we never even hear about it, and when the a building collapses in Bangladesh, the government there just walks away.

I walked away. I shouted you ruined my day. He threw an empty vegetable box at one of his employees. She gave him a really dirty look. I went back to talk with him. I hope he apologizes to her. He did to me. Sort of. The visceral impact of the devastation to the Richard family, neighbors, friends, coworkers, is alive in this neighborhood of Dorchester, a raw wound that will fester for some time.

At it's heart this is a story, a narrative, a rationale, for clannishness, for racism, for all the social walls which divide us. I saw in Billy's response to me some hope, that he understood that a more perceptive response to the bombing was not more finger pointing, more us against them, more police, more oppression, but more trust, more openness, more freedom. The answer is more participation in the democratic process.

Voter registration drives are not just useful and necessary tools for insurgent candidates. They build participation in the political system, and participation yields ownership, and ownership leads to expectation of responsible government. All those issues I mentioned above are failures of a responsible government. If the people in those neighborhoods most affected by such social ills become participants in the electoral process, they will be taking a large step in solving them.

In fact these residents of our neighborhoods, , and the candidates who run such campaigns, would be building a true democracy, a participatory democracy. Hosting the Saint Patrick's Day breakfast is a symbol of change, a symbol of inclusion a symbol of acceptance, but it may merely a symbol. Real change comes from real participation, on a day to day basis, with neighbors and coworkers, building the honest and transparent relationships which are the life blood of of a healthy political system. Participation is more than just voting, but voting is a both a first step, and a final step, because voting leads to acting, involving, demanding. It is like raising children; fathers and mothers are not merely biological antecedents, they also must be involved on a day to day basis in the lives of the young.

Democracy is also like dancing. You really can't fake it. Moving with the music is not just a set of steps, but an animal expression, a conversation and communication between people

that is basic, authentic, true. Dance comes not from the head, but from the heart.

In Massachusetts, the current political news is the US Senate race: Markey vs. Gomez. I read in Sunday's paper that Gomez was challenging Markey for failing to campaign. The article did not dispute that.

Odd.

Just two nights before, I had attended a non-fund raising endorsement party for Ed Markey, where Deval Patrick introduced Ed Markey from his neighbor's back yard steps where he had first declared himself for governor. It was a ringing endorsement. Markey then gave his stump speech. The whole thing. It was witty; it was passionate; it was political. Markey is a polished performer. He is right on the issues.

But can he dance? You see, real politics, as opposed to partisan position placement, is like dancing. You can't fake it. Your body can't lie. Needless to say, not many politicians show their moves.

But later that weekend, Markey was forced to. On Sunday, he marched in the Haitian American parade up Blue Hill Avenue in Dorchester. It was a wise and calculated thing to do. More credit to him. Our Haitian State Representative Linda Dorcena Forry looked at him, and showed a few moves. He was on the spot. Words would not help him, his intelligence would not help, his ability to explain the intricacies of Internet bandwidth would not help, his charm and good looks would not help. He had to dance to the music of the parade. He did, a little at first, but Linda would not let him off the hook. He danced as if no one was watching. Good for him and better for Linda. She showed she was more than a symbol, placed up on the rostrum, but a live human being, and she brought out from our presumably next Senator that same quality of life. A little at first, according to Monday's paper, a little at first, and then a lot.

Now, if he can work to convince all those people standing on the sidelines, watching the parade, wall flowers in the political process, to get out on the dance floor, he will not only win the election, a good thing, but expand participation in the political process, and that will be a great thing.

Endnote 1: Regarding turnout, in the course of my analysis, I discovered a most interesting statistic: The total vote for John McCain in the district, that is the Republican candidate for president in 2008, in which about 65,000 people voted, was a just under 13,000 votes, and the total vote for Scott Brown, in 2010, when 41,000 people voted, was just under 13,000 votes. The Republicans, in this iron clad democratic district, get their people out, with no hope of winning, in equal numbers for each election. Odd ...

Endnote 2: Without going into much detail, my guess is this reversal of racial participation happened in the 2012 Presidential election because, first of all, Obama ran an effective get out the vote campaign, and second, Romney failed to ignite the passion for, or the trust of,

people most likely to vote for him. But that is a different study.]