



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on September 14, 2011

Economic Woes Trump Entitlement Fears in Special House Elections

Growing dissatisfaction with the nation's economic woes appeared to trump fears of cuts to Social Security and Medicaid in special elections for U.S. House seats in New York and Nevada, as Republicans held on to a seat in a solidly Republican district in Nevada and trounced the Democrats in an overwhelmingly Democratic district in the Empire State.

Republican Bob Turner 70 (left), a retired cable television executive, defeated better-known and better-funded New York Assemblyman David Weprin to become the first Republican elected to represent New York's 9th congressional district since 1920.



While Weprin, 55, had not conceded by early Wednesday morning, the Associated Press showed the unofficial count had Turner leading 54 to 46 percent with 84 percent of the precincts counted. The two men squared off in a special election to fill the seat vacated by Democrat Anthony Weiner, who resigned in June after admitting to sending sexually explicit messages to women he had met on the Internet.

Turner described the race as a referendum on Barack Obama and Republicans were quick to celebrate the victory as another setback for the President, whose poll numbers have been falling as discontent with an anemic economic recovery has grown.

"I'm telling you I am the messenger," Turner said, predicting the message "will resound in 2012."

"An unpopular President Obama is now a liability for Democrats nationwide," Representative Pete Sessions of Texas, chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, said in a statement released Tuesday night. Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida, the chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee, downplayed the significance of the vote. "In this district, there is a large number of people who went to the polls tonight who didn't support the president to begin with and don't support Democrats - and it's nothing more than that," she said in an interview with the [New York Times](#).

Turner triumphed in a district where registered Democrats outnumber their Republican counterparts 3-1. The Democratic Party and labor unions poured \$1.5 million into the race, the [New York Post](#) reported, and the Weprin campaign heavily outspent Turner with a barrage of ads, mailings and phone calls. Weprin, a former city councilman, was considered the heavy favorite in a district that encompasses working-class neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Queens and has been represented by prominent Democrats, including former Democratic vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro and Charles Schumer, currently the senior U.S. Senator from New York. Schumer and City Council Speaker Christine Quinn both campaigned in the district for Weprin, while New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and former President Bill Clinton recorded phone calls for the campaign. Former Governor George



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Pataki and former Mayor Rudy Giuliani were among the Republicans who weighed in on behalf of Turner, who trailed in the polls until the final week of the campaign. But Turner's call to "send a message" to Washington caught on with many of the district's voters.

"We need to deliver a message to Washington," John Doherty a retired social worker from Middle Village, Queens told the *Times*. "We need jobs, and we need to focus on the economy, and we need to stop fighting with one another," said Doherty, a Democrat.

In a district with a large number of Jewish voters, the Republican candidate also gained support from Democrats by focusing on what many see as the President's weakening of U.S. support for Israel. Turner repeatedly took issue with Obama's call for Israel to negotiate a return to its pre-1967 borders in peace talks with the Palestinian Authority. Former New York Mayor Ed Koch was among the prominent Jewish Democrats who publicly endorsed Turner, a Roman Catholic, over Weprin, an observant Jew.

"I said to myself, 'We need to turn this election into a referendum [on Obama]'. And we did!" Koch said Tuesday night. "This was an earthquake, an absolute earthquake," said Brooklyn Assemblyman Dov Hikind, an Orthodox Jewish Democrat who also backed Turner. The Republican challenger successfully channeled the anger and anxiety over the President's policies and the stagnant economy into a victory on election night.

"We've had it with your treatment of Israel!" Turner thundered, surrounded by hundreds of Orthodox Jewish supporters just after midnight.

"I voted for Turner to send Obama a message on the economy and Israel," Elaine Kaye, an Orthodox Jew, told the *Post*. Joe Altschuler, a registered independent, said, "My vote was against Obama. I certainly don't like his policy on Israel. The stimulus was a waste of money. This is a guy who talks great but doesn't deliver." Weprin's vote in the state Assembly in favor of same-sex marriage might also have cost him votes from socially conservative voters.

Democratic campaign ads characterized Turner, who favors eliminating the capital gains tax, as a champion of the rich who would cut Social Security and Medicare benefits. Turner has said he favors preserving Social Security and Medicare "as they are" for anyone who is now 55 or older, but would support raising the retirement age for those now under 55. He also said an increase in Medicare co-payments should be considered.

Candidates followed similar game plans in northern Nevada's Second District, where Republican Mark Amodei captured about 58 percent of the votes in the heavily Republican district, defeating Democrat Kate Marshall, who drew 36 percent in the unofficial tally. The race was to fill the seat of Republican Dean Heller, who was appointed to the U.S. Senate to replace Republican John Ensign. Ensign resigned in May after admitting to having an affair with the wife of a member of his staff.

Each candidate accused the other of being tied to the politics of Washington. Amodei portrayed Marshall as closely tied to President Obama, Vice President Biden and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada in his ads, including one, titled "Echo," that included a clip of Marshall repeating the "Yes, we can" mantra of Obama's 2008 campaign. Another ad stressed the same "Send them a message" theme that Turner employed successfully in New York. With the picture of Obama, Biden and Reid on the screen, Amodei said: "We were promised recovery. We've been given misery. Let's get Washington's attention."

Marshall countered with an ad in which Amodei was seen and heard praising as "excellent" the plan put



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forth by House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, (R-Wisconsin), to privatize Medicare for those now under 55. "Amodei thinks it's excellent to give seniors a voucher, double their out of pocket costs and give tax breaks to millionaires," the ad said.

While the margin of victory is impressive, Amodei's win came as no surprise in a district that hasn't elected a Democrat since it was created in 1983. But In New York 's 9th District, the first Republican elected in 91 years hailed his victory as a harbinger of things to come.

"We have lit one candle today," Turner said. "It's going to be a bonfire pretty soon."



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