

The Washington Post

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Republican wins Democratic New York House seat

By [Paul Kane](#), Published: September 13

With the outcome of his own reelection effort 14 difficult months away, President Obama suffered a sharp rebuke Tuesday when voters in New York elected a conservative Republican to represent a Democratic district that has not been in GOP hands since the 1920s.

Bob Turner, the winner, cast the election as a [referendum on Obama's stewardship](#) of the economy and, in the state's Ninth Congressional District, which has a large population of Orthodox Jewish voters, the president's position on Israel.

Turner, 70, a retired cable TV executive who has never served in elective office, defeated Democratic State Assemblyman Weprin, 55, who has two decades of experience in public service, to fill the seat left vacant when Anthony Weiner (D) resigned in disgrace in June after more than 12 years in the House.

With almost 88 percent of the voted counted, Turner had a lead of 54 percent to Weprin's 46 percent, according to the Associated Press.

The defeat came as Republicans trounced Democrats in another special House election Tuesday, in northern Nevada, where Republican Mark Amodei led Democrat Kate Marshall, 56 percent to 39 percent almost from the start.

In both contests, the GOP pulled ahead by linking the Democratic candidate to Obama and his handling

of the economy. Both Republican contenders urged voters to “send a message” to the president.

In the two weeks leading up to Tuesday’s elections, [Democrats](#) conceded that they could not win in Nevada — essentially a Republican seat reverting to form after some competitive races by Democrats, including Obama in 2008.

New York was a different story. National Democrats poured more than \$500,000 into a last-ditch effort to save the seat and deployed former president Bill Clinton and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo (D) to try to mobilize voters.

Both races were sparked by sexual political scandals. Weiner resigned after it was revealed that he had sent lewd photos of himself to women via his Twitter account. The Nevada seat came open in May when Rep. Dean Heller (R) was appointed to fill the term of John Ensign (R), who resigned amid allegations that he had inappropriately aided his mistress’s family.

The New York race, for a seat representing a large portion of Queens and a slice of Brooklyn, also turned on Obama’s handling of Israel and Palestine. The district’s large contingent of Orthodox Jews opposes his proposal for Palestinian statehood drawn around 1967 borders. The U.N. General Assembly is likely to vote on the Palestinian statehood issue when it convenes in New York next week.

Turner spent the final days of his campaign blasting Obama on the economy and on his perceived lack of support for Israel. Democrats worry that the apparent drag that the president had on Weprin could be repeated and amplified nationwide during the 2012 elections.

“Make no mistake about it, the albatross around Weprin’s neck is named Obama, and Democrats who value honesty will tell you privately that the president’s 37 percent approval rating in the district is making it difficult for Weprin to win a race that in almost any other time would be a slam-dunk,” Stuart Rothenberg, an independent analyst and editor of the Rothenberg Political Report, wrote Tuesday.

Obama won New York’s Ninth District in 2008 with 55 percent of the vote, less than the 67 percent Al Gore received there in 2000. But even in a down year for Democrats, Weiner coasted in 2010 to an almost 20-percentage-point victory over Turner.

Democrats rejected talk that Tuesday’s election was a referendum on Obama and noted its highly unusual circumstances, including Weiner’s resignation and the fact that the contest was held two days after the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks. The 9/11 remembrances essentially brought the race to a halt on Sunday. Also, in a special election with a small turnout, the district’s large number of Orthodox Jews — who have drifted from Democrats since George W. Bush’s first term — played an outsize role in tilting the race toward Turner.

“This is a special election that is purely reflective of who showed up to the polls and the makeup of the district,” Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (Fla.), chairman of the Democratic National Committee, said in an interview after the defeat.

She said that Orthodox Jews, whose approval rating of Obama stands at just 13 percent, were far outnumbered in other districts with large numbers of Jewish voters and that this result will not be replicated elsewhere. “There isn’t any comparison between districts like mine and New York Nine,” she said.

Turner, who ran as a staunch conservative embracing the tea party, will be the first House Republican

representing this portion of Queens since the 1920s — a striking departure from its Democratic traditions. This is the district that sent the late Geraldine Ferraro, the Democratic Party's 1984 vice presidential nominee, to Congress, as well as Sen. Charles E. Schumer, one of the party most consistent liberal voices.

In Nevada, national Republicans poured more than \$800,000 into a campaign that linked Marshall to Obama. Amodei, a former state senator, ran one ad that moved back and forth between words uttered by Obama and similar phrases from Marshall.

“Send Washington a message,” the ad's narrator said, “not a rubber stamp.”

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