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NYC CRIME

Bronx politician pleads guilty in absentee ballot scheme for Assembly election

By BEN KOCHMAN

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS | NOV 22, 2016



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Hector Ramirez only lost by two votes after he and his allies tricked voters into signing absentee ballot and later writing in Ramirez's name. (Michael Schwartz /for New York Daily News)

A Bronx politician who was just two votes shy from being elected to the state Assembly pleaded guilty Tuesday to criminally tampering with ballots.

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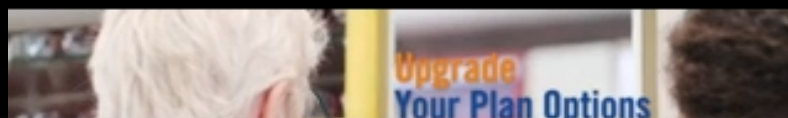
"I don't know what could happen in three years, but what I can tell you is that I'm going to continue fighting in the Bronx for justice, for equal justice for everybody and against the corruption," Ramirez told the Daily News after pleading guilty to one count of criminal possession of a forged instrument.

Bronx Supreme Court Justice Steven Barrett sentenced the longtime pol to no jail time, on the condition that he does not run for office for three years.

Dozens of victims had testified that Ramirez and his allies [tricked them into voting on their behalf](#) during the 2014 Democratic primary, prosecutors said.

Ramirez's staff knocked on voters' doors and convinced them to sign an absentee ballot, insisting that they did not need to go to the polls, court papers state.

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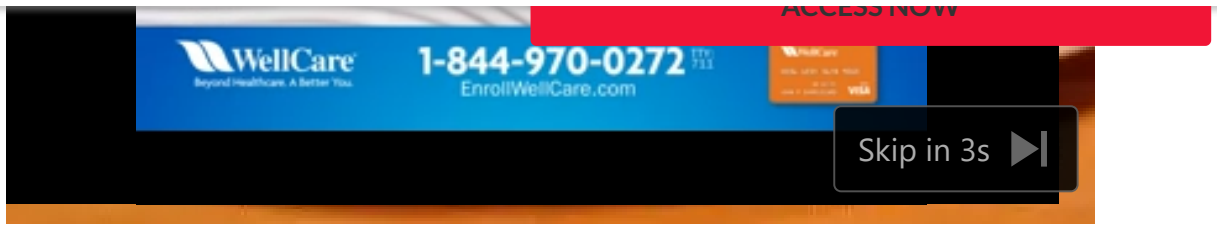


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Prosecutors charged that Ramirez and his team then wrote in Ramirez's name on the forged ballots and handed them into the Board of Elections.

The tactic nearly worked — Ramirez had edged out incumbent Victor Pichardo by a handful of votes before a hand recount found Pichardo ahead by two votes.

The 242-count indictment did not stop him from running against Pichardo again in the west Bronx 86th District this fall. Pichardo was reelected.

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As a court officer led him down the hallway to take a DNA sample — a condition of the plea — Ramirez insisted the community he admitted to repeatedly duping would still trust him enough to one day elect him to public office.

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"The community trusts me, the community believes in me," he told The News, "because everybody knows how justice works, especially in Bronx County."

Ramirez's campaign aide, Ana Cuevas, also pleaded guilty Tuesday, but just to a violation, not a crime.

"The voters of the 86th Assembly District should feel vindicated, with the news of justice being served to my former opponent," Pichardo said.

"These tactics demonstrate a blatant disregard to the democratic process and a lack of respect to voters in the Bronx. Now we can focus on issues that are important to my constituents like affordable housing, access to a quality education and creating jobs for

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