SNP Congressional Poverty Forum

Media Coverage as of May 19, 2014

- The New York Times
  http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/15/nyregion/rangel-at-debate-wields-a-phone-to-mock-his-opponents.html?_r=0

- Capital New York

- The New York Observer (1 of 3)

- The New York Daily News

- New York True
  http://www.newyorktrue.com/slugfest-at-st-lukes/

- DNAinfo

- Newsmax
  http://www.newsmax.com/politics/rangel-debate-new-york-congressional/2014/05/15/id/571503/

- Mediaite

- The Blaze
  http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2014/05/15/charlie-rangel-actually-did-something-pretty-funny-during-his-debate/

- The New York Observer (2 of 3)

- Harlem World Magazine

- The New York Observer (3 of 3)
  http://observer.com/2014/05/daily-show-takes-on-charlie-rangels-mock-phone-call/#ixzz32Avrhur9

- The Daily Show with Jon Stewart
  http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/ok93lb/the-old-man-and-the-cell
Representative Charles B. Rangel deployed an unusual weapon against his two Democratic primary opponents in a debate on Wednesday night: his iPhone.

Moments into his opening statement, Mr. Rangel, a 22-term congressman, pretended to get a call. He told the imaginary caller that he was in a debate and did not have much time to talk — then started into a monologue, delivered in a chatty tone, mocking each of his opponents in turn.

“No, he’s been there 18 years, but he didn’t say he passed any bills at all,” he said of State Senator Adriano D. Espaillat.

Of his other opponent, the Rev. Michael A. Walrond, a close associate of the Rev. Al Sharpton, Mr. Rangel noted that Mr. Sharpton had not endorsed him and said: “Listen, how can he register to vote in New York when he lives in Jersey?”

Finally, the moderator at St. Luke A.M.E. Church in Harlem told Mr. Rangel that his three minutes were up and he had to get off the phone.

It was a suitably bizarre opening moment for a raucous debate in which Mr. Rangel shouted himself hoarse in his effort to discredit his rivals.

Mr. Rangel is facing perhaps the toughest election of his career. New York’s 13th Congressional District, which he represents, is no longer a stronghold of African-American political power. It now stretches into the Bronx and the population is majority Latino, giving a potential boost to Mr. Espaillat, who is Dominican-American. The primary is on June 24.

Mr. Espaillat and Mr. Walrond, who looked on stonily during Mr. Rangel’s opening, wasted little time in hitting back.

Mr. Espaillat described himself as an “organizer at heart” and promised to “organize this community so we can go to Washington and show our strength.” He ridiculed Mr. Rangel as part of the “Washington elite.”

Mr. Walrond reeled off statistics about the district and said that while he lacked experience as a politician, he had fed the hungry as the minister of First Corinthian Baptist Church in Harlem.

“You do not feed people with bills, you feed them with food,” he said.

Mr. Rangel dismissed his opponents as full of passionate talk but lacking the connections in Congress to achieve their goals.
“We’re not praying, we’re not just talking, we want to legislate,” he shouted, with his hand slicing through the air.

He repeatedly suggested that Mr. Espaillat had not passed any bills during his 18-year tenure in Albany. In fact, Mr. Espaillat has passed at least three bills that became law during three sessions in a Republican-controlled Senate.

Mr. Walrond’s spokesman, Peter Brown, said that Mr. Walrond had moved into the district from New Jersey in January and conceded that his voting record was spotty.

The audience frequently made itself heard, too. Although audience members had laughed throughout Mr. Rangel’s opening monologue, when he said in his closing statement that he wanted to have his “two-year contract extended,” some in the audience responded with shouts of “No!” and “For what?”
After mostly avoiding direct confrontations, Rep. Charlie Rangel attacked his two main rivals at the start of their second debate on Wednesday night.

In his opening remarks, Rangel pulled out his iPhone, pretending to receive a phone call, and launched into an extended criticism of State Senator Adriano Espaillat’s record in Albany, saying he never passed a single bill.

"I'm in the middle of a debate," Rangel said into his telephone. "No, it's for the United States Congress. Espaillat's already spoken. ... He's been there [in the New York State legislature] for 18 years but he didn't seem to pass any bills at all. Well, the guy's only there half of the time."

Espaillat, seated to Rangel's left, looked over, unamused. Rangel, continuing the fake phone call, noted it was Espaillat who once called the congressman "the Lion of Lennox Avenue," but sought to oust him after the district was redrawn to include parts of the Bronx.

"He thought he could win," Rangel said.

The debate at the St. Luke A.M.E. Church in Washington Heights was hosted by the Urban Justice Center, which advocates for low-wage residents.

Espaillat criticized Rangel's antics as belittling to the issue of poverty, on which organizers sought to focus attention.

"Poverty and hunger are not a joking matter, congressman," Espaillat said. He repeatedly noted how Albany legislators, like himself, had to "step in" because of funding cuts made in Washington, where Rangel has served since 1970.

Rangel, seemingly annoyed to have to defend his record, replied, "We know it's no joke. But it's a joke to tell you these are things that I believe when I've been in a legislative body for 18 years and I have not been able to deal with one piece of legislation that deal with any of the problems here. Not one piece."

When asked about affordable housing and public housing, Espaillat told the audience it was important to have an effective lawmaker in Congress.

"Mayor de Blasio just put out a very ambitious housing plan. Two-hundred thousand units of affordable housing. Guess what? He won't be able to accomplish that unless Washington steps in. And Washington has stepped out," he said.
Rangel, in an attempt to talk about the free market failure to build affordable housing, appeared to make a verbal gaffe, saying, "First of all, we shouldn't have public housing. Public housing was put up because there wasn't created affordable housing." Espaillat consultant Lis Smith, who worked on Obama's rapid response team in 2012, seized on the public housing remark, Tweeting it and emailing reporters to make sure they saw it.

Rangel also mocked the third major candidate in the race, Rev. Michael Walrond, noting Walrond was living in New Jersey until recently.

In his opening remarks, on the telephone, Rangel said, "Listen, how could he register to vote in New York when he lives in Jersey?" Later, he said, "the Congress is not a praying body. It's a legislative body."

The performance on Wednesday echoed a new, more aggressive stance the 83-year-old is taking as he fends off a challenge from Espaillat, who has garnered additional support since he nearly ousted Rangel in 2012. Rangel, who suffered from a bad back at the time, never fully engaged Espaillat in 2012, and seemed reluctant to do so at the outset of this year's campaign.

But at a fund-raiser in Harlem on Monday night, Rangel previewed tonight's attacks, telling Capital, “I’m really sick and tired of trying to prove that I’m a good member of Congress. To whom? To Walrond? To [Espaillat?] What bills has he passed in Albany?”

After the debate Wednesday night, I asked Rangel why he did the fake phone call at the start of the evening.

"I wanted to get these statements out, for the press and everyone to check out the facts, not the rhetoric," he said. Another reporter asked if he rehearsed it.

"No, I just thought about it," he said. "People in my campaign are probably having a hemorrhage."

I asked Rangel if his newfound aggressiveness was evidence he was concerned about losing.

"No, I just don’t like people asking questions that have nothing to do with the Congress."

Outside the church, Espaillat spoke to reporters and said the issues facing the district were not a joke, taking offense to Rangel's theatrics earlier. After he ended his scrum, Espaillat passed by Rangel and did not appear to shake hands or talk to him.

After Rangel's turn with the press, Walrond waited on Amsterdam Avenue, patiently waiting for reporters to surround him, and said the increased attacks from the congressman were a positive sign for his campaign.

"I think the last time we came to the debate there were many people, including the congressman that did not take me seriously," he said, adding, "tonight, I saw [Rangel] coming out, swinging a little bit harder. But that just tells me more of the fear that exists and how much more seriously I’m being taken. I cannot be dismissed in this race at all."

At the Harlem fund-raiser on Monday night, Rangel recalled a conversation with a supporter, who worried that the congressman didn't "want to take the gloves off." Rangel said he assured the supporter, "I’m not going to get mud on my hands, with or without gloves."
Congressman Charlie Rangel, clearly feeling the effects of his growing vulnerability, went into attack mode this evening, lobbing insults at the two men trying to deny him a 23rd term in their second debate.

In place of his opening statement, Mr. Rangel pulled out his cell phone and proceeded to engage in a mock conversation, using his allotted three minutes to theatrically jab State Senator Adriano Espaillat, who nearly ousted him two years ago in a newly re-drawn district, and Pastor Mike Walrond, an impressive debater, whose backers packed St. Luke A.M.E. Church in Washington Heights.

“Espaillat’s already spoken … No, no he didn’t say he passed any bills. No, no, no, no, he’s been there 18 years, but he didn’t say he passed any bills at all,” said Mr. Rangel, his phone pressed against his ear, as laughter rang through the church. “What happens was they changed the lines. Yes, it went to the Bronx. Yeah, when he looked at what happened in the Bronx, he thought he could win!”

He then set his sights on Mr. Walrond: “The reverend is here. He hasn’t spoken yet … The reverend says that he doesn’t know anything about legislation … Listen, how can he register to vote in New York when he lives in Jersey?” said Mr. Rangel—a dig at Mr. Walrdon’s old address. “Rev. Sharpton hasn’t endorsed him … He’s very active at the National Action Network. They liked him. They haven’t endorsed him.”
The attacks marked a significant shift in the trio’s dynamics from their first debate, when Mr. Rangel largely tried to stay above the fray as his opponents piled on. Tonight Mr. Espaillat and Mr. Walrond were ready to fight back.

“Poverty and hunger are not a joking matter. This is a serious matter of substantive discussion that we should be having for all the residents of our district,” lectured Mr. Espaillat, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, whose candidacy is bolstered by demographic trends. The 13th Congressional district, which extends from Harlem through Washington Heights and parts of the Bronx, is now majority Latino.

Mr. Espaillat stressed his own immigrant success story and accused a broken Congress—and Mr. Rangel—of failing to address the needs of the district. He repeatedly tried to paint Mr. Rangel as an out-of-touch Washington insider, at one point declaring, “I know that Congressman Rangel’s 30,000 feet in the air with the Washington elite, but I take the subway and the bus everyday and I’m here with this community.”

Mr. Walrond, a dynamic preacher whose supporters packed the pews, meanwhile pointed to Mr. Rangel’s diminished power since he lost the chairmanship of the Ways and Means committee as part of his punishment for a series of ethical breaches.

“It is about passing legislation, but it’s about having people in Congress who can actually begin to gain seniority, so that we can have persons who can represent,” he argued.

Mr. Rangel, meanwhile, appeared frustrated as he tried to shift the conversation back to his record.

“Anyone can state the problems eloquently,” he said. “We’re not praying. We’re not just talking. We want to legislate! The Congress is a legislative body. The question has to be: What do you intend to do as a priority when you get to Congress?”

“The question has to be: What would you do when you get there? What committees would you take it to? How’re you going to get it signed into law, and not how you’re barking at the moon wishing that it was something going to happen,” he later added. “We’re talking about going to the United States House of Representatives. Not wishing, not praying. But going there, passing legislation.”

After the debate, Mr. Rangel said that he’d come up with the phone call idea on the fly before the debate and hoped the tactic would help put the spotlight on his opponents.

“I wanted to get these statements out for the press and everyone to check out the facts, not the rhetoric,” he said. “These are the questions that people ask me.”

“The people in my campaign, they’re probably having a hemorrhage,” he added.

Still, the Congressman brushed off his shift in tactics, insisting it was not a reflection of larger concerns about the direction of the race.

“I guess the older I get, the better I get. I don’t know,” he quipped. Asked to assess his odds, he added: “I’m an incumbent. So with me it’s just an extension of my contract.”

Mr. Walrond, however, offered a different explanation. “I think when people are desperate they do desperate things. And I think taking pot shots and swipes at where I live … I think when you do those things, when you become dishonest … it’s a sign of desperation,” he said. “I think the Congressman feels the pressure of this campaign.”
Rep. Charles Rangel spars with his challengers in second debate

BY ANNIE KARNI / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS / Wednesday, May 14, 2014, 11:08 PM

Wily Charlie Rangel pulled an unorthodox opening move in Wednesday evening’s debate against the two challengers for his congressional seat.

In his opening remarks at the St. Luke A.M.E. Church on W. 153rd Street, the dean of New York's congressional delegation pretended to receive a call on his cell phone.

“The guy’s only there half of the time. He always supported me in anything I did,” he told his fictional interlocutor of State Sen. Adriano Espaillat, while the crowd chuckled. “What happened was, they changed the lines….Yes, it went to the Bronx. When he looked at what happened in the Bronx, he thought he could win,” he said, referring to a redistricting change that added more Latino voters.

When it came time to dispose of Rev. Michael Walrond, Rangel previewed a knock he would bring out multiple times during the evening: “How could he register to vote in New York when he lives in Jersey?”

Walrond, who moved to the district recently from New Jersey and preaches at the First Corinthian Baptist church in Harlem, quickly clarified the record in his opening remarks.

“I do not live in New Jersey, let’s begin with that,” he said.

And Espaillat appeared unamused by Rangel's cute hijinks.

"Poverty and hunger are not a joking matter,” he said.

The debate, hosted by the Safety Net project, focused on issues of poverty in the district, which has the highest concentration of NYCHA housing in the country.

Over the course of the evening, Espaillat and Walrond took turns painting themselves as change agents in touch with the 13th congressional district’s struggling constituents -- in contrast to an out-of-touch Washington insider.

And the candidates, who debated once last month, raged at each other most over the question of affordable housing and hunger.

“Mayor de Blasio just put out his very ambitious housing plan, 200,000 units of affordable housing,” said Espaillat. “He won’t be able to accomplish that unless Washington steps in. Washington has stepped out.”
He called the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development an “abstentee landlord” and pitched the idea of converting the 207th street rail yard into a “potential site for affordable housing and tech center for young people.”

For his part, Rangel questioned the system that lead the need for affordable housing in the first place.

“For first of all, we shouldn’t have public housing,” Rangel said. “Everyone should be able to have the income to live where they want. The marketplace should be placed on where they want to live.”

Rangel said that Walrond had assembled 100 ministers in Harlem to work toward decent housing. “I haven’t seen you at the meetings,” he said. “The reason I’m being provocative is when this debate is over, we got to put up, and I got the record and they don’t.”

But Espaillat seized the moment to hit back. “I think I overheard him say that public housing was not necessary,” he said.

“I did not say that! I did not say that!” Rangel bellowed, while the crowd heckled him. “We shouldn’t need food stamps. We shouldn’t need welfare, we shouldn’t need houses for the poor. We shouldn’t need homeless shelters, we shouldn’t have jails. What are you going to do about it? One thing we have to do is work with this President, we only got two years.”

Rangel’s main criticism throughout the evening was that Espaillat has served for 18 years in a legislative body and had “not been able to deal with one piece of legislation that deals with any of the problems here.”

But Espaillat’s campaign pointed out after the debate that the Senator had passed five bills through the Senate in three sessions, including prohibiting NYCHA from charging tenants for use of community spaces.

Both of Rangel’s challengers dinged him for his inside-the-beltway status.

“I know that Congressman Rangel’s 30,000 feet in the air with the Washington elite, but I take the subway and the bus every day, and I’m here with this community,” Espaillat said.

Walrond reiterated his pitch that he was the only candidate who hasn’t been an elected official for years, and therefore part of the problem. “Now’s the time for new energy, new passion,” he said.

“I’m a pastor in this community for ten years...I’m feeding people for the past ten years. We feed over 20,000 families a year...while they talk about organizing, I’m building a community that takes care of one another. you do not feed people with bills, you feed them with food.”
The three Democratic candidates in the 13th Congressional slugged it out tonight in a debate sponsored by the Urban Justice Center Safety Net Project and hosted by St. Luke A.M.E. Church.

**Opening Statements:**

Here is Congressman Rangel’s unusual opening.

**Update – Post-Debate Media Avails:**

Following the debate, all three candidates spoke separately with the press.

**Espaillat**

Senator Espaillat began with criticism of Congressman Rangel’s opening statement and concluded with a comment about their personal interactions. With a small twist at the end.

**Rangel**
Congressman Rangel addressed whether he’s been “far more aggressive in this debate than [he] was before.”

Walrond

Rev. Walrond began with the observation that the other candidates take him much more seriously than they did early in the race.

(The full debate video follows after the jump.)

Update #2 – Full Debate:

Here, in all it’s glory, is the full debate:
HARLEM — After a rugged first debate last month where he fended off attacks from his two main challengers, incumbent Rep. Charles Rangel came out swinging in a second debate Wednesday evening.

The 83-year-old congressman used his opening statement at St. Luke’s A.M.E. Church on Amsterdam Avenue, which is close to the Washington Heights and Harlem border, to pretend he was being interrupted by an inopportune phone call.

For the next few minutes, he verbally abused state Sen. Adriano Espaillat, 59, and the Rev. Michael Walrond, 42, questioning everything from Walrond's residency in Harlem and Espaillat's legislative record during his time in Albany.

"He's been there 18 years but he didn't pass any bills at all," Rangel said during his mock conversation that included the use of his cellphone as a prop.

"The reverend says he doesn't know anything about legislating," Rangel said in turning the focus of his make-believe conversation to Walrond.

Rangel then questioned where the pastor lives. "How can he register and vote in New York when he lives in New Jersey?" asked Rangel.

Both criticisms are dubious. Walrond has worked as a pastor at First Corinthian Baptist Church in Harlem for 10 years and says he moved here from New Jersey in January.

According to an analysis of the 2013 state legislative session by the New York Public Interest Research Group, Espaillat introduced 141 bills with two passing in his own house and in both houses.
Rangel drew laughs throughout the skit until moderator Christina Greer, a professor of political science at Fordham University, said she had to "cut off" the phone call.

Both Walrond and Espaillat quickly criticized him for being insensitive, given the topic of the debate — poverty.

"Poverty and hunger are not a joking matter. This is a serious matter," Espaillat said.

Walrond said he understood poverty because he and his wife received government benefits as young college graduates with a family. He called the display a "performance devoid of substance" and the "politics of misdirection."

The skit, and Rangel's demeanor, including raising his voice during several monologues and the occasionally boisterous audience members, demonstrated the tenacious nature of the race the longtime congressman is facing for his 23rd term in the June 24 Democratic Primary.

Espaillat lost to Rangel by approximately 1,000 votes in the last primary and has garnered the support of many local politicians who endorsed Rangel in 2012. Walrond — with his youthful, enthusiastic and expanding congregation — is expected to siphon votes in Rangel's political home base of Central Harlem.

When it came to issues of poverty, both Walrond and Espaillat resumed their attacks from the first debate, saying that Rangel's policies over the last four decades have worsened the problems of poor and working class people in the 13th congressional district, which includes parts of the Bronx, Inwood, Washington Heights and the Upper West Side, on everything from jobs to housing.

Espaillat said Rangel-sponsored funding for development projects in places like 125th Street have left residents with "$8 per hour jobs" that help perpetuate poverty while ignoring large swaths of the district.

One of Rangel's signature accomplishments, the Empowerment Zone, was nothing but a bunch of "back-room deals" that misspent money on "subsidizing the rich," in Espaillat's estimation.

Walrond grew tired of Rangel talking about his legislative prowess and answered a question from John Medina, a board member of debate sponsor Community Voices Heard, about food stamp cuts by talking about how his church's food program fed thousands of people per year.

"You do not feed people with bills, you feed them with food," Walrond said.

The Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center was the other debate sponsor.

Espaillat proposed increasing federal funding for public housing and building large scale affordable housing developments and a technology center on the 207th Street rail yards that would be the polar opposite of the upscale housing and office space being constructed at the Hudson Rail Yards on Manhattan's far west side.

Rangel continued to focus on his seniority in Congress and experience as his main advantage and the central reason why he should be given another term, even as he was heckled when he said he was just "asking for my two year contract to be extended."

"When this debate is over we have to put up and I got the record and they don't," Rangel said.
Controversial Rep. Charles B. Rangel's primary debate against his two Democratic rivals took a bizarre turn when he pulled out a cell phone and pretended to talk to a caller during his turn to take the floor.

The New York Times reported that Rangel pulled out his BlackBerry during the Wednesday night debate in Harlem and acted as if he was chatting to someone on the other end of the line about his two rivals.

"No, he’s been there 18 years, but he didn’t say he passed any bills at all," he said of his main opponent, State Sen. Adriano D. Espaillat.

Of the other candidate, the Rev. Michael A. Walrond, Rangel said: "Listen, how can he register to vote in New York when he lives in [New] Jersey?"

Walrond is also a close friend of the Rev. Al Sharpton, who has yet to endorse him.

Finally after his three minutes were up, the moderator at St. Luke A.M.E. Church had to inform him it was time to hang up on his fake call.

The Times reported that Rangel shouted so much during the debate that he made himself hoarse.

The 13th Congressional District in New York, which has been a shoe-in for Rangel for 22 terms, is now up for grabs since it now also encompasses the Latino stronghold of the Bronx, which favors Dominican-American Espaillat. The primary election is June 24.
Espaillat hit back at Rangel and called him part of the "Washington elite," according to the Times. Walrond said that he was a minister of First Corinthian Baptist Church in Harlem where he fed the hungry. "You do not feed people with bills, you feed them with food," he said, mocking Rangel.

Separately, the New York Post reported Wednesday that Rangel’s campaign manager was involved in creating a nonprofit group that has come under investigation.

Rasheida Smith, is listed on the incorporation papers of the nonprofit, which is called New York 4 Life. State officials say City Councilman Reuben Wills stole more than $30,000 from New York 4 Life to buy items such as a $750 Louis Vuitton handbag. Smith’s home address was listed as the nonprofit’s headquarters.
Democratic congressman Charlie Rangel made a rather odd choice for opening statement in Wednesday’s Democratic primary debate for his House seat: pretending to take a phone call. And what followed was a strange comedy routine bashing his two opponents while the audience in attendance ate it up.

He took a few shots at State Senator Adriano Espaillat, telling the “person” on the phone, “No, no, he didn’t say he passed any bills. No, no, no, no, he’s been there 18 years, but he didn’t say he passed any bills at all.” When his fake conversation partner chimed in, Rangel said, “Well, the guy was only there half of the time.”

He also went after Reverend Michael Walrond a bit, asking, “How can be register to vote in New York when he lives in Jersey?” The entire time, Rangel kept his phone to his ear, and the audience reacted like they were at a Comedy Central roast.

Which, let’s face it, would be a fun new tone for political debates…
NEW YORK, NY - Rep. Charlie Rangel (D-N.Y.) during a debate Wednesday night pulled out an iPhone and pretended to have an extended conversation wherein he harshly criticized his opponents.

“I’m in the middle of a debate,” Rangel said during his opening remarks against New York state Sen. Adriano Espaillat. “No, it’s for the United States Congress. Espaillat has already spoken. … He’s been there [in the New York state legislature] for 18 years but he didn’t seem to pass any bills at all. Well, the guy’s only there half of the time.”

It’s an old gimmick, one popularized by comedian Bob Newhart, but it was effective, as the reaction from the debate audience indicated.

The state senator did not look amused, especially when Rangel reminded the room that it was Espaillat who once called him the “the Lion of Lennox Avenue,” Capital New York reported.

“He thought he could win,” Rangel continued into the phone, adding that the relationship between him and Espaillat soured when congressional lines near the Bronx were redrawn.

The debate, which was hosted by St. Luke A.M.E. Church in Washington Heights focused on a range of issues, including poverty and unemployment.

“Poverty and hunger are not a joking matter, congressman,” Espaillat said, adding that the situation hasn’t been helped by lawmakers who have been in Washington, D.C., since the mid-1970s.

Espaillat took a shot specifically at Rangel’s phone gag, saying that it belittled the seriousness of the issues faced by their constituents.

“We know it’s no joke. But it’s a joke to tell you these are things that I believe when I’ve been in a legislative body for 18 years and I have not been able to deal with one piece of legislation that deal with any of the problems here. Not one piece,” Rangel responded.
When Congressman Charlie Rangel whipped out his cell phone last night at a debate and began to chide his rivals in an imaginary conversation, State Senator Adriano Espaillat had one thought: this is wacky.

“Wacky, very wacky. I thought I had seen everything when I saw the Yoga debate in Albany but, this tops it,” Mr. Espaillat told reporters at a press conference with the Transportation Workers Union in uptown Manhattan today.

“For him to take his phone and make like a joke—what is he going to do, karaoke next time?” asked Mr. Espaillat. “Our constituents don’t deserve that.”

Mr. Rangel’s cell phone tactic was the most colorful moment of an acrimonious debate last night between the top three candidates vying to represent uptown’s 13th Congressional District, which spans from Harlem through parts of the Bronx. In the debate, Mr. Rangel, who has been in office for four decades, mocked both Mr. Espaillat and Pastor Mike Walrond, a long-shot contender, for not measuring up to his tenure in Congress.
But Mr. Espaillat, who nearly beat Mr. Rangel two years ago and has been racking up a bevy of local establishment support including the TWU, was far from amused. He decried Mr. Rangel during the debate and further elaborated on his dissatisfaction today.

“That’s got one name: It’s called desperation. I won’t be subject to desperation,” fumed Mr. Espaillat, standing outside the Kingsbridge Bus Depot as trains thundered on an elevated track above the scrum. “I have a substantive record, I’m not gonna get up there and sing and dance because that’s not what I do. I want to have a substantive discussion about the issues.”

“If Charlie Rangel wants to do a karaoke next time, that’s up to him but frankly, I think it’s an embarrassment,” he added.

Mr. Rangel’s campaign mocked Mr. Espaillat’s complaints.

“Sounds like the only call Senator Espaillat is making is to the wambulance because no one is paying any attention to him after he lost the debate,” said James Freedland, a spokesman for Mr. Rangel.
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The skit, and Rangel’s demeanor, including raising his voice during several monologues and the occasionally boisterous audience members, demonstrated the tenacious nature of the race the longtime congressman is facing for his 23rd term in the June 24 Democratic Primary.

Espaillat lost to Rangel by approximately 1,000 votes in the last primary and has garnered the support of many local politicians who endorsed Rangel in 2012. Walrond — with his youthful, enthusiastic and expanding congregation — is expected to siphon votes in Rangel’s political home base of Central Harlem.

When it came to issues of poverty, both Walrond and Espaillat resumed their attacks from the first debate, saying that Rangel’s policies over the last four decades have worsened the problems of poor and working class people in the 13th congressional district, which includes parts of the Bronx, Inwood, Washington Heights and the Upper West Side, on everything from jobs to housing.

Espaillat said Rangel-sponsored funding for development projects in places like 125th Street have left residents with “$8 per hour jobs” that help perpetuate poverty while ignoring large swaths of the district.

One of Rangel’s signature accomplishments, the Empowerment Zone, was nothing but a bunch of “back-room deals” that misspent money on “subsidizing the rich,” in Espaillat’s estimation.

Walrond grew tired of Rangel talking about his legislative prowess and answered a question from John Medina, a board member of debate sponsor Community Voices Heard, about food stamp cuts by talking about how his church’s food program fed thousands of people per year.

“You do not feed people with bills, you feed them with food,” Walrond said.

The Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center was the other debate sponsor.

Espaillat proposed increasing federal funding for public housing and building large scale affordable housing developments and a technology center on the 207th Street rail yards that would be the polar opposite of the upscale housing and office space being constructed at the Hudson Rail Yards on Manhattan’s far west side.

Rangel continued to focus on his seniority in Congress and experience as his main advantage and the central reason why he should be given another term, even as he was heckled when he said he was just “asking for my two year contract to be extended.”

“When this debate is over we have to put up and I got the record and they don’t,” Rangel said.
In a segment he labeled “The Old Man and the Cell,” The Daily Show’s Jon Stewart mercilessly mocked Congressman Charlie Rangel last night for a pretend phone call he made during a debate earlier this week.

“Eighty-three years old and 43 years in office. Censured by Congress in 2010 after a photo of him asleep in front of his Dominican villa, on which he failed to pay taxes, became the symbol of his extensive financial malfeasance,” began Mr. Stewart in a bit aimed at the difficulties of booting long-time incumbents from office.

Mr. Rangel is locked in what many see as the toughest fight of his political life as he battles State Senator Adriano Espaillat, who almost defeated him two years ago, and Pastor Mike Walrond, to win a 23rd and final term.

“What could Rangel do to come out a winner? Check your pockets, MacGyver because the clock is ticking and he’s got to come up with something!” the host joked.

Mr. Stewart proceeded to play clips from the unusual debate gag, which Mr. Espaillat yesterday slammed as “wacky” and “an embarrassment.”
“You know what? I think this is how Charlie Rangel stays in office so long,” Mr. Stewart offered. “Yes, he’s corrupt. But he’s very likable. I mean, he figured out how to be a total dick to the guys sitting right next to him, without having to have any responsibility for said dickishness”

He then pointed to John Conyers, the longtime Michigan congressman, who failed to collect enough signatures to appear on the state’s Democratic primary ballot. “Wow, so without term limits, we just have to wait until congress people get so old they lose signatures like keys,” he quipped.