

March 11, 2008

[Volokh](#) post points out Spitzer irony.

... So Elliot Spitzer, aggressive former white collar crime prosecutor, was brought down because he couldn't outsmart banks looking for evidence of white collar crimes.

Spitzer posts from a lot of our favorites.

Bad news for the GOP in Illinois. [John Fund](#) has the details.

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"The one thing 2008 has shown is that one election in one state does not prove a trend," she noted. Fair enough. Indeed in June, 2006, Republicans retained a California seat in a high-profile special election, but that had no predictive value given that Democrats stomped their way to control of Congress a few months later.

But special elections in highly visible seats do have a psychological effect on parties. Not only can they boost or depress morale, but they can affect how political contributions flow in the months leading up to the general election.

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[Mark Steyn](#) Corner post.

[Todd Spivak](#), Houston Press reporter reports his coverage of Obama back in the day.

This is long, but will provide a good flavor for Obama and Chicago politics.

It's not quite eight in the morning and Barack Obama is on the phone screaming at me. He liked the story I wrote about him a couple weeks ago, but not this garbage.

Months earlier, a reporter friend told me she overheard Obama call me an asshole at a political fundraiser. Now here he is blasting me from hundreds of miles away for a story that just went online but hasn't yet hit local newsstands.

It's the first time I ever heard him yell, and I'm trembling as I set down the phone. I sit frozen at my desk for several minutes, stunned.

*This is before Obama Girl, before the secret service detail, before he becomes a best-selling author. His book *Dreams From My Father* has been out of print for years.*

I often see Obama smoking cigarettes on brisk Chicago mornings in front of his condominium high-rise along Lake Michigan, or getting his hair buzzed at the corner barbershop on 53rd and Harper in his Hyde Park neighborhood.

This is before he becomes a U.S. senator, before Oprah starts stumping for him, before he positions himself to become the country's first black president.

He is just a rank-and-file state senator in Illinois and I work for a string of small, scrappy newspapers there.

The other day, while stuck in traffic on Houston's Southwest Freeway, I was flipping through right-wing rants on AM radio. Dennis Praeger was railing against Michelle Obama for her clumsy comment on being proud of her country for the first time.

*Praeger went on to call her husband a blank slate. There's no record to look at, he complained, **unless you lived in Barack Obama's old state Senate district.***

Well, I lived and worked in that district for three years — nearly half Obama's tenure in the Illinois Legislature. D-13, the district was called, and it spanned a large swath of the city's poor, black, crime-ridden South Side.

It was 2000 and I was a young, hungry reporter at the Hyde Park Herald and Lakefront Outlook community newspapers earning \$19,000 a year covering politics and crime.

I talked with Obama on a regular basis — a couple times a month, at least. I'd ask him about his campaign-finance reports, legislation he was sponsoring and various local issues. He wrote an occasional column published in our papers. It ran with a headshot that made him look about 14 years old. ...

Canada's National Post has a great op-ed on globalony.

Just how pervasive the bias at most news outlets is in favour of climate alarmism -- and how little interest most outlets have in reporting any research that diverges from the alarmist orthodoxy -- can be seen in a Washington Post story on the Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change (NIPCC), announced last week in New York.

The NIPCC is a counter to the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC. The group was unveiled this week in Manhattan at the 2008 International Conference on Climate Change, along with its scientific report claiming that natural factors -- the sun, El Ninos and La Ninas, volcanoes, etc, -- not human sources are behind global warming.

The Washington Post's first instincts (not just on its opinion pages, but in its news coverage, too) were cleverly to sow doubt of the group's credibility by pointing out to readers that many of the participants had ties to conservative politicians, such as former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, and that the conference sponsor -- the Heartland Institute -- received money from oil companies and health care corporations.

That's standard fare, and partly fair, so that's not what I am talking about.

The insidiousness I am referring to is the unfavourable way the Post compared the NIPCC report to the IPCC's famous report of last year.

After reminding readers that the IPCC and former U.S. vice-president Al Gore shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 for their work on climate change, the paper then, sneeringly, added: "While the IPCC enlisted several hundred scientists from more than 100 countries to work over five years to produce its series of reports, the NIPCC document is the work of 23 authors from 15 nations, some of them not scientists."

First of all, the IPCC and Mr. Gore won the Peace Prize, not a science prize, which only proves they are good at politics. They didn't win the Physics Prize, for instance. ...

Volokh Conspiracy

How Spitzer Was Caught

by Orin Kerr

Of all the ironic aspects of the Elliot Spitzer scandal, I think the most remarkable is how he got caught. Based on stories like [this](#) and [this](#), it looks like Spitzer got caught because the prostitutes he hired were so expensive that he needed to shuffle several thousands of dollars around each time. Spitzer knew that banks report suspicious money transfers to the IRS to combat financial frauds and money laundering, so he tried to structure his money transfers to avoid suspicion. But the banks thought his activity was still suspicious, so they reported him and the IRS opened an investigation under the assumption that Spitzer was trying to launder money he had obtained from bribes. But he wasn't laundering money — he was paying prostitutes. So Elliot Spitzer, aggressive former white collar crime prosecutor, was brought down because he couldn't outsmart banks looking for evidence of white collar crimes.

The Corner

Boy meets girl meets Mann [Mark Steyn]

Re that "consenting adults", nobody's business but theirs, etc, Andrew, don't forget he arranged a tryst in DC with a hooker from NY:

The governor's alleged conduct may have violated the Mann Act, which forbids the transportation of prostitutes across state lines for the purposes of sex.

Mr. Spitzer's role in procuring the train ticket could tempt any of the several federal prosecutors based between New York and Washington to try to charge the governor with conspiring to violate the Mann Act. The law, from 1910, was also known as the "White-slave traffic act," and is rarely used anymore.

"If they indicted him some place for that, that's a disgrace," a prominent defense attorney, Edward Hayes, who is not connected to the case, said. "For what, paying for the train ticket? Come on, leave the guy alone."

Yeah, but this guy never left anyone alone and contributed mightily to one of the worst trends in American justice: the metastasization of narrowly drawn laws into all-purpose blunt instruments. My friend Conrad Black, charged with "racketeering", and convicted of "obstruction of justice" by a law hitherto only used extra-territorially for witness-tampering, is merely one of the more prominent victims of the Spitzerization of federal prosecution. Almost every white-collar federal offense - wire fraud, mail fraud - boils down to "paying for the train ticket".

Contentions

Eliot Spitzer, Crook

John Podhoretz

The thing is, Eliot Spitzer is a crook. I'm not referring to the current prostitution scandal. I'm not referring to the scandal last year involving his senior aides and the leaking of confidential police

information to the Albany Times Union. I'm not referring to the threatening phone call he made to the august John Whitehead, retired head of Goldman Sachs, who had the temerity to question a case Spitzer was building against an old friend of Whitehead's. I'm referring to his conduct dating back to 1994, when he designed a complex scheme involving loans and real estate and collateralized apartments [to evade campaign-finance laws](#) so that his own father, Bernard Spitzer, could pay for his campaign as attorney general of New York state. Millions of dollars. And then, in 1998, running for the same office, he did it again. It's hard to explain, but basically, Spitzer's father gave him a lot of real estate. He used it to secure loans totaling more than \$8 million. Then his father paid back the loans. He was supposed to pay his father back. He said he did. Then he acknowledged he hadn't. Then somehow it all went away. I'm not a big fan of campaign-finance laws, but they are laws, and they are supposed to apply to everybody.

The rules don't apply to Eliot Spitzer, or at least, that's how Eliot Spitzer has acted throughout his public life. *Sic transit gloria mundi*.

Roger's Rules

[Why you shouldn't let Eliot Spitzer get away with being called a hypocrite](#)

by Roger Kimball

Having just learned the news about New York Governor Eliot Spitzer's expensive taste in tarts, a friend emailed to ask me what was the fancy word was that meant taking malicious pleasure in the misfortune of others: "Spitzer?" he suggested.

I have never liked Mr. Spitzer and his intrusive, rogue-prosecutorial ways. I take it amiss that even in his disgrace we are all going to be subjected to a non-stop Spitzerfest for the next 48-72 hours. Why can't he simply disappear? I am already more than sated on the stories of The Emperor's Club, whose experts earn nearly as much as a successful law partner. Still, there have been a few gems to emerge from the glee. My favorite so far was highlighted by Glenn Reynolds at [Instapundit](#): "[Prostitute Admits Link to Elliott Spitzer; Resigns From Escort Service in Disgrace](#)." Pretty good, eh?

There have also been a spate—no, a cataract—of reflections about hypocrisy, including an amusing [passe](#) at Protein Wisdom. My own feeling is that there are so many reasons to dislike Eliot Spitzer that I would hate the issue of hypocrisy to obscure his many other, more heinous faults. In fact, I am not entirely sure Mr. Spitzer rises to the level of the genuine hypocrite. ...

The Corner

[Prostitution & Federal Criminal Law](#) [Andy McCarthy]

I have been bugged out with the flu, and as a result I've seen a lot of the commentary — including, of course, "expert" commentary, which has been something less than expert.

The general approach of the federal law to prostitution mimics its approach to gambling. They are activities that tend to generate big profits for organized crime syndicates, which profits not only enrich the racketeers but underwrite their various other rackets, including loan-sharking, narcotics trafficking, murder-for-hire, etc.

In Governor Spitzer's case, moreover, it's worth remembering the Nevada senator character in *Godfather II* who is blackmailed into doing the Corleones' bidding on Capitol Hill. That vignette involved a murder frame-up in a brothel, but the extortion scheme was realistic because the senator had patronized a prostitution business run by the mafia. (A similar issue arose with President

Clinton's phone-sex on non-secure phones with Monica Lewinsky — which was not a "private matter" because it raised the specter of a U.S. president's leaving himself vulnerable to blackmail by any foreign intelligence service that managed to tap the phone.)

In any event, it would seem Spitzer has more to worry about than just the Mann Act — which has been on the books since 1910 (it's now located at Sections 2421 et seq. of Title 18, U.S. Code) and proscribes interstate transportation in aid of prostitution.

The racketeering laws contain a provision, much loved by prosecutors, commonly known as the "Travel Act" — and more formally as "Interstate and foreign travel or transportation in aid of racketeering enterprises." The Travel Act makes it a crime to travel in interstate commerce with the intention of, among other things, promoting, conducting or distributing the proceeds of unlawful activity (expressly including prostitution), if, after the travel, such an illegal activity is performed. It would, for example, be a felony violation of the Travel Act (punishable by up to five years' imprisonment), to travel across state lines (or aid and abet a prostitute in doing so) for the purpose of promoting or carrying on the business of a prostitution ring; it would, similarly (and separately), violate the Travel Act to send the prostitute back across state lines to distribute the proceeds of the prostitution.

Then there is money laundering. Steve Spruiell [mentioned](#) "structuring" yesterday, referring to an ABC report. Contrary to Brian Ross's suggestion, it's not an obscure crime at all — it's very frequently prosecuted. Under federal law, banks are required to file currency transaction reports for cash transactions over \$10K. The idea is to smoke out organized crime and/or narcotics enterprises — innocent people in legitimate cash businesses have no concern about filing CTRs. But if you are generating cash by illegal transactions, you have a motive to evade the CTR requirements. What such people will frequently do is, say, break a single \$30K transaction into four deposits or withdrawals of less than \$10K—the transaction is thus "structured" to avoid triggering the CTR requirement. If that is done with criminal intent, it's a felony under the money laundering laws.

But there's an even simpler money laundering law that I imagine the Governor may be concerned about. You have committed a felony violation, punishable by up to 20 years in jail, if you have money that is the proceeds of some form of illegal activity (including prostitution), and you conduct a financial transaction with those proceeds (a) with the intention of promoting certain crimes (including prostitution), or (b) with the knowledge that the transaction is designed to conceal how the proceeds were generated. If I understand the allegations correctly, Spitzer not only obtained and paid in cash in order not to leave a paper trail, but paid extra cash in order to set up a credit with the prostitution ring for future use. That raises the possibility of money laundering under both the promotion and concealment theories.

And it bears noting we are speculating at this point based on the single episode we know about. I think it's fair to assume, in light of the level of familiarity exhibited in the conversations described in the complaint, that there are other episodes and that the government knows more than what it has so far alleged.

Finally, I'd note that these laws have all been on the books for a long time because they reflect society's view of what ought to be illegal. If the society had evolved beyond prostitution being criminal, the laws would have been repealed. They haven't been — not because we think it's the most serious crime in the world (most Johns are not prosecuted), but because we recognize that prostitution harms the society, not least by fueling enterprises that do engage in serious crime.

Contentions

Hillary's Spitzer Challenge

by Abe Greenwald

The Eliot Spitzer sex scandal has to be a nightmare for Hillary Clinton. On the crudest level, Spitzer's alleged dalliances remind everyone of Bill Clinton, his intern, his cigar, her dress, his claim, and his impeachment—the sum of which spells Hillary's humiliation. Having finally figured out that her husband's PR magic was rusty, Hillary pulled him from the spotlight. Now, his very worst qualities are front and center in the nation's minds.

This sets her back slightly on the “hear me roar” front, too. As Hillary is in the midst of a push to prove herself as the battle-hardened, Batphone-answering candidate, there stands Silda Spitzer, the governor's wife, looking every inch the betrayed woman. The fact that Hillary is a prominent Democrat from New York can't help either. Spitzer enthusiastically threw his support behind Hillary. And any additional associations with him, even subliminal ones, can work against a candidate who is trying to emerge from the perception of distrust.

Last night, at a campaign stop in Pennsylvania, Hillary dodged questions about Spitzer. “I don't have any comment on that. Obviously I am sending my best wishes and thoughts to the governor and to his family” she said. But things could get appreciably stickier for Hillary if Spitzer keeps people guessing about his resignation. At that point it becomes a Democratic issue and a New York issue, and Hillary is going to have to weigh in. (There's talk that Spitzer is holding off on resigning in order to work it into a plea deal.) If that drags on, Hillary can expect a barrage of questions that won't be sidestepped so easily. Advising Spitzer to quit, after her husband stood his ground in the face of the vast right wing conspiracy, will require Hillary to draw on her not-so-ample supply of political finesse. And just to make matters more complicated, Spitzer is a superdelegate. If he resigns, his superdelegate status goes too, and Hillary loses one potential convention vote.

WSJ

Reagan Country Votes Democratic

by John Fund

Karen Hanretty, the spokesman for the National Republican Congressional Committee, had a terse response to the startling loss of former Speaker Dennis Hastert's seat in a special election in Illinois on Saturday.

"The one thing 2008 has shown is that one election in one state does not prove a trend," she noted. Fair enough. Indeed in June, 2006, Republicans retained a California seat in a high-profile special election, but that had no predictive value given that Democrats stomped their way to control of Congress a few months later.

But special elections in highly visible seats do have a psychological effect on parties. Not only can they boost or depress morale, but they can affect how political contributions flow in the months leading up to the general election.

That should worry Republicans because history does show that some special elections have captured a growing mood against the party that controls the White House. In early 1974, Republicans lost the Michigan seat vacated by Gerald Ford when he was appointed vice president by Richard Nixon, a clear sign that Watergate was weighing heavily on GOP political fortunes. Twenty years later, Democrats anxiously realized that the Clinton administration was a liability to them in the middle of

the debate over Hillary Clinton's health care plan after they lost a Kentucky special election. Republican Ron Lewis was able to win an historically Democratic district in part by running an ad showing Democratic candidate Joe Prather morphing into an image of Bill Clinton. The next fall, Democrats were swept out of Congress.

It's unclear what the significance of the GOP's loss in Mr. Hastert's seat is, but the news is not good. Mr. Hastert had won election ten times from the district on the outer fringes of the Chicago metro area, which also includes the birthplace of Ronald Reagan. It is a normally Republican seat, giving George W. Bush 55% of the vote in 2004.

But Democratic physicist Bill Foster, a political neophyte, was able to win 53% of the vote to seize the seat from Republican dairy owner Jim Oberweis. The two candidates will face each other again in the fall, but Mr. Foster's incumbency will make him the favorite in the rematch.

Certainly the weakening economy and the unpopularity of President Bush played a role in the Oberweis defeat. But there were some other factors that need to be considered before pronouncing judgment on the race's national significance.

Democratic Governor Rod Blagojevich took the unusual step of calling the special election for a Saturday, ostensibly to see if it would increase voter turnout. But that proved to be a bust, with less than one in five registered voters showing up at the polls. What a Saturday election did do was enable Democrats to mobilize hundreds of union workers to canvass the district and drum up support for Mr. Foster. By way of contrast, the Republican Party in the district was unused to competitive Congressional races. "Hastert had won for so long so easily, the party was flabby and not used to a tough race," says Penny Pullen, a former state legislator and state director of Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum.

Mr. Oberweis, a sometimes prickly multimillionaire, also did himself no favors. Hastert operatives and other party bosses pulled strings to deliver the nomination to him despite his strained relations with many Republicans and his record of losing three previous races. The Hastert machine exhibited the current prejudice of Republican leaders in favor of "self-funders" who can finance their own campaigns, even though they may not be the most skilled of candidates.

The tilt of the local party in his favor along with a prohibitive financial advantage allowed Mr. Oberweis to win the nomination over State Senator Chris Lauzen, a movement conservative who lacked Mr. Oberweis' deep pockets. The extremely bitter primary fight between the two men led Mr. Lauzen to withhold his full support of Mr. Oberweis in the special election. "I know a lot of solid conservatives whose resentment at the nasty ads, the party-boss politics caused them actually to vote for Foster," a prominent conservative activist from the district told me.

As for the \$1 million the National Republican Congressional Committee poured into the district in a vain attempt to save it, the local reviews weren't good. Even before Mr. Oberweis' loss I heard comments such as "nasty," "stupid," "largely incomprehensible" and "factless" to describe the national ads that saturated the district. "The ads bore no relation to any issues competent polling would have surfaced; they were just schoolyard name calling," was the opinion of a conservative media specialist in the district.

By way of contrast, Democrats made a heavy buy for an ad featuring local Senator Barack Obama touting Mr. Foster's credentials as a scientist and problem solver. "He represents the change we need," the Obama ad concluded. Obamamania may not be as strong among the general electorate as it is among Democratic partisans, but in Saturday's special election it certainly helped the

Democratic candidate score a victory. Mr. Foster's win is a wake-up call to Republicans that this year they will have to step up their game, big time.

John Fund

[Reverend Al Enters the Fray](#)

When a leading Democrat starts talking about filing lawsuits over a disputed election in Florida, other Democrats have a right to get nervous. They have too many bad memories of the nightmare of Florida's 2000 Bush v. Gore election fiasco.

That's exactly the feeling that the Reverend Al Sharpton caused this weekend when he began threatening to sue the Democratic National Committee if it counts Florida's rogue primary results for purposes of allocating delegates in the presidential race between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

The New York Sun reports that Mr. Sharpton is heading to Florida to collect lists of people willing to claim they didn't vote in that state's January primary because they believed the DNC when it said (because of the Florida primary's illicit scheduling) their votes wouldn't count. Mr. Sharpton says millions of Florida voters will have been disenfranchised if delegates selected in an illicit primary (the majority of whom back Hillary Clinton) now are seated at the national convention.

Mr. Sharpton is widely seen as a stalking horse for Barack Obama, who doesn't want the disputed delegates from either Florida or Michigan seated. Mr. Sharpton told Fox News that if Mr. Obama loses the nomination because of "back-room deals" made by superdelegates, "you not only would see people like me demonstrating, you may see us talking about whether or not we can support that [Democratic] ticket."

Democrats are deep in discussions about how to seat delegations from Florida and Michigan without triggering a backlash from a rabble-rouser such as Mr. Sharpton. Over the weekend, a possible solution emerged when two governors who back Hillary Clinton, Jon Corzine of New Jersey and Ed Rendell of Pennsylvania, said they were willing to privately raise half the \$30 million it would take to run new primaries in both states.

Whatever the solution, it had better come quickly. The Florida and Michigan dispute is threatening to raise the rancor among Democrats to unacceptable levels. The last thing the party needs is to have its own Rube Goldberg primary rules dominate political news coverage.

The Corner

[Hello, faddah, hello, mama, here I am at Camp Obama](#) [Mark Steyn]

There are, as it turns out, three Americas: one where John Edwards is livin' it up on a gazillion dollars a year; one where you're rubbing along on much less; and one where downtrodden hardworking folks are struggling to make ends meet on half-a-million a year. Byron quoted this [heartbreaking vignette](#) from Obamaland a week or so back:

"We spend between the two kids, on extracurriculars outside the classroom, we're spending about \$10,000 a year on piano and dance and sports supplements. And summer programs... Do you know what summer camp costs?"

Don Surber responds to [Princess Michelle](#):

Well, actually I don't. None of my kids went. I spent a week once at Camp Wanakee...

In 2005, Mrs. O's salary was \$316,962 at the University of Chicago Hospital. She's a lawyer, not a doctor.

Hubby's pay as a U.S. senator topped \$160 K that year.

If you are struggling to make ends meet on a half-million a year — a 1040 that puts you in the top 2% of Americans — then the problem is you, not the country.

Still this woman, who was never proud of America when her husband was elected to the state legislature or even the United States Senate, whines and whines and whines.

America is, she said, "just downright mean."

"Yes, we can!" says Obama. But not on a mere 500 grand a year.

Houston Press

Barack Obama and Me

It was the year 2000 and I was a young hungry reporter in Chicago covering a young hungry state legislator

By Todd Spivak



During his seven-year tenure in the Illinois Legislature, Obama wrote an occasional column for the *Lakefront Outlook* community newspaper where I worked. In 2004, during his U.S. Senate bid, I profiled Obama for the *Illinois Times*.



Illinois Senate President Emil Jones Jr. was Obama's kingmaker.

It's not quite eight in the morning and Barack Obama is on the phone screaming at me. He liked the story I wrote about him a couple weeks ago, but not this garbage.

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This is before he becomes a U.S. senator, before Oprah starts stumping for him, before he positions himself to become the country's first black president.

He is just a rank-and-file state senator in Illinois and I work for a string of small, scrappy newspapers there.

The other day, while stuck in traffic on Houston's Southwest Freeway, I was flipping through right-wing rants on AM radio. Dennis Praeger was railing against Michelle Obama for her clumsy comment on being proud of her country for the first time.

Praeger went on to call her husband a blank slate. There's no record to look at, he complained, unless you lived in Barack Obama's old state Senate district.

Well, I lived and worked in that district for three years — nearly half Obama's tenure in the Illinois Legislature. D-13, the district was called, and it spanned a large swath of the city's poor, black, crime-ridden South Side.

It was 2000 and I was a young, hungry reporter at the *Hyde Park Herald* and *Lakefront Outlook* community newspapers earning \$19,000 a year covering politics and crime.

I talked with Obama on a regular basis — a couple times a month, at least. I'd ask him about his campaign-finance reports, legislation he was sponsoring and various local issues. He wrote an occasional column published in our papers. It ran with a headshot that made him look about 14 years old.

Spinning through my old Rolodex, I see that I had two cell phone numbers for Obama. Both have since been disconnected.

I also had cell phone numbers for Jesse Jackson, his son Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr., and David Axelrod, who now serves as Obama's senior presidential campaign adviser.

Axelrod, too, had begun his journalism career at the *Hyde Park Herald* before joining the *Chicago Tribune* as a political reporter then starting a political consulting firm. Another *Hyde Park Herald* alum was Seymour Hersh, the legendary investigative reporter who uncovered the My Lai massacre for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the Abu Ghraib prisoner-abuse scandal for *The New Yorker*.

My view of Obama then wasn't all that different from the image he projects now. He was smart, confident, charismatic and liberal. One thing I can say is, I never heard him launch into the preacher-man voice he now employs during speeches. He sounded vanilla, and activists in his mostly black district often chided him for it.

I was 25 and had no problem interviewing big-wig politicians. But I always had to steel my nerves when calling Obama. His intelligence was intimidating, and my hands inevitably shook with sweat.

It was serendipity that I ever came to know Obama at all. Looking back, I think of it as a Forrest Gump moment: History was unfolding and I was at the center of it, clueless. It's a huge bummer to me that I never taped our interviews.

I moved to Chicago from the East Coast after a bad breakup. I had just one year of newspaper experience under my belt, working the courts beat for a small Vermont daily.

I picked Chicago because I had friends there. Plus, it was one of the few American cities left with two competing dailies, upping my chances of landing a gig.

I arrived determined to work for one of the big papers. I once spent an entire day dressed up in my only suit and tie — the one I wore to my brother's wedding, where I ripped a hole in the knee while dancing with my niece — and stood, résumé in hand, outside the newsroom at the dumpy old *Chicago Sun-Times* building.

Columnist Neil Steinberg was gracious enough to accept my folder and even gave me his home number to call later that night. Unimpressed by my clips, Steinberg said most new recruits graduated from top journalism schools such as Northwestern or Columbia — or their mommies or daddies worked at the paper or knew somebody who did.

His advice: To work in Chicago, you have to leave Chicago. Go prove yourself someplace else, kid.

I had a friend at one of the local journalism schools who let me tag along for a school-sponsored tour of the *Chicago Tribune* building. After the tour, page-two columnist John Kass told us about how he got picked up by the *Tribune* while in his early 20s after breaking a big story at a little South Side paper.

I spent three months sleeping on a friend's floor on the city's South Side. He was a broke grad student who had earned a mostly free ride at the University of Chicago, working toward a Ph.D. in comparative literature. His studio apartment in Hyde Park was tiny.

We joked that the only way I could stretch my legs at night was to open the oven in the kitchen. It was like the old blues lyric, "I got a gal she's long and tall, sleeps in the kitchen with her feet in the hall."

Obama, who then earned about \$50,000 a year as a rookie state senator, lived in a small condo just two blocks away. I had never met or even seen his wife Michelle, though I'd heard she was employed at University of Chicago Hospitals. Their second daughter Natasha had not yet been born.

Every day, I walked past the *Hyde Park Herald* office, set upstairs from Obama's barbershop. The newspaper box out front said all I needed to know. It was dented, covered in graffiti and broken. The thing ate your two quarters and offered nothing in return.

I didn't want to work there. My aspirations were bigger than that.

Desperate, I finally swallowed my pride, climbed the steep, smelly staircase and submitted my shamefully thin résumé to the receptionist. To my dismay, the editor called later that afternoon with a job offer.

Chris Matthews, the MSNBC political pundit, recently grilled Texas State Senator Kirk Watson for supporting Obama despite knowing nothing about the candidate's legislative record.

"Can you name any — can you name anything he's accomplished?" Matthews pressed.

"No," Watson, whose district includes Austin, finally admitted. "I'm not gonna be able to do that."

"Well, that's a problem, isn't it?" Matthews said.

Hillary Clinton recalled the incident with a chuckle during last Thursday's debate at the University of Texas.

When asked about his legislative record, Obama rattles off several bills he sponsored as an Illinois lawmaker.

He expanded children's health insurance; made the state Earned Income Tax Credit refundable for low-income families; required public bodies to tape closed-door meetings to make government more transparent; and required police to videotape interrogations of homicide suspects.

And the list goes on.

It's a lengthy record filled with core liberal issues. But what's interesting, and almost never discussed, is that he built his entire legislative record in Illinois in a single year.

Republicans controlled the Illinois General Assembly for six years of Obama's seven-year tenure. Each session, Obama backed legislation that went nowhere; bill after bill died in committee. During those six years, Obama, too, would have had difficulty naming any legislative achievements.

Then, in 2002, dissatisfaction with President Bush and Republicans on the national and local levels led to a Democratic sweep of nearly every lever of Illinois state government. For the first time in 26 years, Illinois Democrats controlled the governor's office as well as both legislative chambers.

The white, race-baiting, hard-right Republican Illinois Senate Majority Leader James "Pate" Philip was replaced by Emil Jones Jr., a gravel-voiced, dark-skinned African-American known for chain-smoking cigarettes on the Senate floor.

Jones had served in the Illinois Legislature for three decades. He represented a district on the Chicago South Side not far from Obama's. He became Obama's kingmaker.

Several months before Obama announced his U.S. Senate bid, Jones called his old friend Cliff Kelley, a former Chicago alderman who now hosts the city's most popular black call-in radio program.

I called Kelley last week and he recollected the private conversation as follows:

"He said, 'Cliff, I'm gonna make me a U.S. Senator.'"

"Oh, you are? Who might that be?"

"Barack Obama."

Jones appointed Obama sponsor of virtually every high-profile piece of legislation, angering many rank-and-file state legislators who had more seniority than Obama and had spent years championing the bills.

"I took all the beatings and insults and endured all the racist comments over the years from nasty Republican committee chairmen," State Senator Rickey Hendon, the original sponsor of landmark racial profiling and videotaped confession legislation yanked away by Jones and given to Obama, complained to me at the time. "Barack didn't have to endure any of it, yet, in the end, he got all the credit.

"I don't consider it bill jacking," Hendon told me. "But no one wants to carry the ball 99 yards all the way to the one-yard line, and then give it to the halfback who gets all the credit and the stats in the record book."

During his seventh and final year in the state Senate, Obama's stats soared. He sponsored a whopping 26 bills passed into law — including many he now cites in his presidential campaign when attacked as inexperienced.

It was a stunning achievement that started him on the path of national politics — and he couldn't have done it without Jones.

Before Obama ran for U.S. Senate in 2004, he was virtually unknown even in his own state. Polls showed fewer than 20 percent of Illinois voters had ever heard of Barack Obama.

Jones further helped raise Obama's profile by having him craft legislation addressing the day-to-day tragedies that dominated local news headlines.

For instance, Obama sponsored a bill banning the use of the diet supplement ephedra, which killed a Northwestern University football player, and another one preventing the use of pepper spray or pyrotechnics in nightclubs in the wake of the deaths of 21 people during a stampede at a Chicago nightclub. Both stories had received national attention and extensive local coverage.

I spoke to Jones earlier this week and he confirmed his conversation with Kelley, adding that he gave Obama the legislation because he believed in Obama's ability to negotiate with Democrats and Republicans on divisive issues.

So how has Obama repaid Jones?

Last June, to prove his commitment to government transparency, Obama released a comprehensive list of his earmark requests for fiscal year 2008. It comprised more than \$300 million in pet projects for Illinois, including tens of millions for Jones's Senate district.

Shortly after Jones became Senate president, I remember asking his view on pork-barrel spending.

I'll never forget what he said:

"Some call it pork; I call it steak."

In Hyde Park, I eventually moved into a room a few blocks from the newspaper offices. For \$150 a month, I lived in a former servant's quarters with a closet and a connecting bathroom set just off the kitchen in a dingy apartment occupied by several grad students. My eight-by-eight room fit a mattress on the floor and not much else.

During those rare moments when I wasn't working or hanging out with my new girlfriend, I sat on the apartment's crumbling back deck smoking cigarettes and drinking beer in cans with a very nice but drug-addicted homeless woman who crashed in a sleeping bag on the cement floor below. A couple years later, I wrote her obituary.

Hyde Park was the most racially integrated neighborhood in a city with a long, tortured history of segregation. Along 53rd Street, the neighborhood's main commercial corridor, chess players filled the parks, student activists chanted political slogans and women clad in bright colors and elaborate headwraps sang church hymns while strolling the sidewalks.

I would sometimes sit smoking on the fire escape outside my office and feel like I'd wandered into a Spike Lee film.

The communities surrounding Hyde Park were predominantly black and impoverished, marked by high crime, boarded-up storefronts and vacant lots. In some residential areas, banks and grocery stores were several miles away.

On the stump, Obama has frequently invoked his experiences as a community organizer on the Chicago South Side in the early 1990s, when he passed on six-figure salary offers at corporate law firms after graduating from Harvard Law School to direct a massive voter-registration drive.

But, as a state senator, Obama evaded leadership on a host of critical community issues, from historic preservation to the rapid demolition of nearby public-housing projects, according to many South Siders.

Harold Lucas, a veteran South Side community organizer who remembers when Obama was "just a big-eared kid fresh out of school," says he didn't finally decide to support Obama's presidential bid until he was actually inside the voting booth on Super Tuesday.

"I'm not happy about the quality of life in my community," says Lucas, who now heads a black-heritage tourism business in Chicago. "As a local elected official, he had a primary role in that."

In addition to Hyde Park, Obama also represented segments of several South Side neighborhoods home to the nation's richest African-American cultural history outside of Harlem.

Before World War II, the adjacent Bronzeville community was known as the "Black Metropolis," attracting African-American migrants seeking racial equality and economic opportunity from states to the south such as Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

Storied jazz clubs such as Gerri's Palm Tavern regularly hosted Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Josephine Baker and many others. In the postwar era, blues legends Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and B.B. King all regularly gigged in cramped juke joints such as the Checkerboard Lounge.

When the City of Chicago seized the 70-year-old Gerri's Palm Tavern by eminent domain in 2001, sparking citywide protests, Obama was silent. And he offered no public comments when the 30-year owner of the Checkerboard Lounge was forced to relocate a couple years later.

Even in Hyde Park, Obama declined to take a position on a years-long battle waged by hundreds of local community activists fighting against the city's plan to replace the historic limestone seawall along Lake Michigan — a popular spot to sunbathe and swim — with concrete steps.

It would be comparable to representing Barton Creek in Austin, and sidestepping any discussion about conservation.

Obama's aloofness on key community issues for years frustrated Lucas and many other South Siders. Now they believe he was just afraid of making political enemies or being pigeonholed as a black candidate. Lucas says he has since become an ardent Obama supporter.

"His campaign has built a momentum of somebody being born to the moment," Lucas says. "He truly gives the perception that he could possibly pull us all together around being American again. And the hope of that is worth the risk when you look at the other candidates. I mean, you can't get away from old school when you look at Hillary."

Lucas even believes Obama made the right choice by declining PBS talk-show host Tavis Smiley's invitation to speak at this week's State of the Black Union 2008 conference in New Orleans.

"Obama can't bring those issues up if he wants to be elected," Lucas says. "And that's the travesty of the situation that we find ourselves in as African-Americans."

In the presidential campaign, Obama has been criticized for a shady land deal and other past ties to Tony Rezko, the Chicago real estate developer and ubiquitous political donor who now faces federal charges of attempted extortion and money laundering.

In a debate held last month before the South Carolina primary, Hillary Clinton charged that Obama had legally represented Rezko "in his slum landlord business in inner-city Chicago." The issue was turned back on her a few days later when an old picture of a smiling Clinton posing with Rezko surfaced on *Drudge Report*.

Though it didn't make national news, Obama inflamed many residents in his old state Senate district last March when he endorsed controversial Chicago alderman Dorothy Tillman in a runoff election.

Flamboyant and unpredictable, Tillman is perhaps best known for once pulling a pistol from her purse and brandishing it around at a city council meeting. The ward she represented for 22 years, which included historic Bronzeville, comprised the city's largest concentration of vacant lots.

Just three months before Obama made his endorsement, the *Lakefront Outlook* community newspaper ran a three-part investigative series exposing flagrant cronyism and possible tax-law violations that centered on Tillman and her biggest pet project, a taxpayer-funded cultural center built across the street from her ward office that had been hemorrhaging money since its inception.

The series won a national George Polk Award, among the most coveted prizes in journalism. Not bad for a 12-page rag with a circulation of 12,000 and no Web site. I had already left the *Outlook* and had nothing to do with the project.

In the end, Tillman lost the election despite Obama's endorsement, which critics said countered his calls for clean government. Obama told the *Chicago Tribune* that he had backed Tillman because she was an early supporter of his 2004 U.S. Senate campaign.

Many speculate Obama only bothered to weigh in on a paltry city council election during his presidential campaign as a gesture to Chicago's powerful Mayor Richard M. Daley, a Tillman supporter. Even so, Obama should have remained neutral, says Timuel Black, a historian and City Colleges of Chicago professor emeritus who lived in Obama's state Senate district.

"That was not a wise decision," Black says. "It was poor judgment on his part. He was operating like a politician trying to win the next step up."

Obama has spent his entire political career trying to win the next step up. Every three years, he has aspired to a more powerful political position.

He was just 35 when in 1996 he won his first bid for political office. Even many of his staunchest supporters, such as Black, still resent the strong-arm tactics Obama employed to win his seat in the Illinois Legislature.

Obama hired fellow Harvard Law alum and election law expert Thomas Johnson to challenge the nominating petitions of four other candidates, including the popular incumbent, Alice Palmer, a liberal activist who had held the seat for several years, according to an April 2007 *Chicago Tribune* report.

Obama found enough flaws in the petition sheets — to appear on the ballot, candidates needed 757 signatures from registered voters living within the district — to knock off all the other Democratic contenders. He won the seat unopposed.

"A close examination of Obama's first campaign clouds the image he has cultivated throughout his political career," wrote *Tribune* political reporters David Jackson and Ray Long. "The man now running for president on a message of giving a voice to the voiceless first entered public office not by leveling the playing field, but by clearing it."

Three years later, in September 1999, Obama was already preparing his first national campaign. He ran for U.S. Congress against veteran incumbent Bobby Rush, a former co-founder of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party.

Rush painted the largely unknown freshman lawmaker as an out-of-touch elitist, and won the 2000 primary by more than 30 percentage points.

Three years later, in January 2003, Obama announced his bid for the U.S. Senate, where he cruised to victory thanks to the self-destruction of his top opponents in both the primary and general elections.

Obama joined a crowded field of seven candidates vying to fill an open Senate seat being vacated by retiring two-term incumbent Peter Fitzgerald. For months, he polled in the middle-of-the-pack behind frontrunner and former securities trader Blair Hull, who spent \$30 million of his own fortune on the primary.

But Hull's campaign imploded just weeks before the election when his divorce files were unsealed, revealing an ex-wife's charges of verbal and physical abuse.

Obama unleashed a barrage of television ads just before the election, when the other candidates had largely depleted their war chests. He won the nomination with 53 percent of the vote.

In the general election, Obama squared off against another multimillionaire: Jack Ryan, who later dropped out of the race after a judge ordered his divorce files unsealed. The documents revealed that Ryan's ex-wife, actress Jeri Ryan, a former Miss Illinois best known for her role as Seven of Nine on *Star Trek: Voyager*, accused him of trying to coerce her to perform sex acts in public.

Obama spent several weeks facing no opponent as the Illinois Republican Party exhausted a laundry list of replacement candidates that included former Chicago Bears coach Mike Ditka. The GOP ended up recruiting two-time failed presidential hopeful Alan Keyes from Maryland to fill the slot.

Keyes's strategy to use bombastic rhetoric to attract headlines turned off most voters. Most memorably, he said Jesus would not vote for Obama and that homosexuals, including Vice President Dick Cheney's daughter, participated in "selfish hedonism."

In the end, Obama won more than 70 percent of the vote in the most lopsided Senate election in Illinois history and became the fifth African-American to win a seat in the U.S. Senate.

Three years later, in February 2007, Obama announced his bid for the White House in front of the Old State Capitol in Springfield, where Abraham Lincoln had made his famous House Divided speech.

I moved to Springfield in early 2004 to work for the *Illinois Times*, where I covered Obama's U.S. Senate bid.

My first assignment was to profile Obama, who was largely unknown in central Illinois.

In fact, at that time just four years ago, Obama was still largely unknown even in his own community.

I followed Obama one wintry morning as he visited several black churches on Chicago's South Side urging people to vote for him in the upcoming primary. Congregants greeted him with lukewarm applause.

I noted in my article that one lady sitting in a pew beside me was noticeably impressed with the young man, and asked to borrow my pen. She wrote on her church pamphlet, "Obama, March 16," then underlined the date.

Over the years, most of my interviews with Obama were conducted by phone. So it felt good when he immediately recognized me and shouted my name from the end of a long, empty hallway inside the church after his speech.

After all, I admired the guy — and still do.

We shook hands and walked outside together. I asked some questions and snapped some pictures before a dark-blue Chevrolet Suburban with tinted windows whisked him off to another congregation less than a mile away. I followed behind in my beat-up Oldsmobile.

My story ran on the cover of the *Illinois Times*. The more I thought about it, though, the more I thought it was fluff. Obama's own public-relations flack could have produced something comparable.

At the time, the Illinois media had fallen head-over-heels in love with Obama and his squeaky-clean image. "As pedigrees go, there is not a finer one among the Democratic candidates," the *Chicago Tribune* gushed in its endorsement.

All this predated TV pundit Chris Matthews's more recent comment that Obama's speeches send chills up his legs.

"He's been given a pass," says Harold Lucas, the community organizer in Chicago. "His career has been such a meteoric rise that he has not had the time to set a record."

A week after my profile of Obama was published, I called some of my contacts in the Illinois Legislature. I ran through a list of black Chicago lawmakers who had worked with Obama, and was surprised to learn that many resented him and had supported other candidates in the U.S. Senate election.

"Anybody but Obama," the late state Representative Lovana Jones told me at the time.

State Representative Monique Davis, who attended the same church as Obama and co-sponsored several bills with him, also did not support his candidacy. She complained of feeling overshadowed by Obama.

"I was snubbed," Davis told me. "I felt he was shutting me out of history."

In a follow-up report published a couple weeks later, I wrote about these disgruntled black legislators and the central role Senate President Emil Jones played in Obama's revived political life.

The morning after the story was posted online, I arrived early at my new offices. I hadn't taken my coat off when the phone rang. It was Obama.

The article began, "It can be painful to hear Ivy League-bred Barack Obama talk jive."

Obama told me he doesn't speak jive, that he doesn't say the words "homeboy" or "peeps."

It seemed so silly; I thought for sure he was joking. He wasn't.

He said the black legislators I cited in the story were off-base, and that they couldn't have gotten the bills passed without him.

I started to speak, and he shouted me down.

He said he liked the other story I wrote.

I asked if there was anything factually inaccurate about the latest story.

He repeated that his former colleagues couldn't have passed the bills without him.

He asked why I wrote this story, then cut me off when I started to answer.

He said he should have been given a chance to respond.

I told him I had requested an interview through his communications director.

He said I should have called his cell phone.

I reminded him that he had asked me months ago to stop calling his cell phone due to his busier schedule.

He said again that I should have called his cell phone.

Today I no longer have Obama's cell phone number. I submitted two formal requests to interview Obama for this story through his Web site, but have not heard back. I also e-mailed interview requests to three of his top staffers, but none responded.

Maybe he'll call the day after this story runs. I'll get to the office early just in case. And this time I'll have my recorder ready.

The National Post, Canada

The media snowjob on global warming

by Lorne Gunter



Just how pervasive the bias at most news outlets is in favour of climate alarmism -- and how little interest most outlets have in reporting any research that diverges from the alarmist orthodoxy -- can be seen in a Washington Post story on the Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change (NIPCC), announced last week in New York.

The NIPCC is a counter to the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC. The group was unveiled this week in Manhattan at the 2008 International Conference on Climate Change, along with its scientific report claiming that natural factors -- the sun, El Ninos and La Ninas, volcanoes, etc, -- not human sources are behind global warming.

The Washington Post's first instincts (not just on its opinion pages, but in its news coverage, too) were cleverly to sow doubt of the group's credibility by pointing out to readers that many of the participants had ties to conservative politicians, such as former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, and that the conference sponsor -- the Heartland Institute -- received money from oil companies and health care corporations.

That's standard fare, and partly fair, so that's not what I am talking about.

The insidiousness I am referring to is the unfavourable way the Post compared the NIPCC report to the IPCC's famous report of last year.

After reminding readers that the IPCC and former U.S. vice-president Al Gore shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 for their work on climate change, the paper then, sneeringly, added: "While the IPCC enlisted several hundred scientists from more than 100 countries to work over five years to produce its series of reports, the NIPCC document is the work of 23 authors from 15 nations, some of them not scientists."

First of all, the IPCC and Mr. Gore won the Peace Prize, not a science prize, which only proves they are good at politics. They didn't win the Physics Prize, for instance.

Also, while the former vice-prez may have invented the Internet (by his own admission), he is demonstrably not a scientist. Yet in the same paragraph as the Washington Post lionizes Mr. Gore for

his work saving the planet, it backhands non-scientists for meddling in the climate change debate, never once showing any hint it recognized its own hypocrisy.

And the paper displays its utter lack of intellectual curiosity, too.

Hundreds of scientists may have contributed bits and pieces of work to the IPCC's gargantuan report, but just 62 wrote the chapter said to "prove" that man is behind global warming -- not that many more than the 23 from the new NIPCC who the Post so snidely dismiss as inconsequential in number. And just 52 people -- many of them the kind of non-scientists the Post would have us believe have no business passing judgment -- wrote the IPCC's "Summary for Policy-makers." That's the publication that gets all the ink and drives the climate alarmism because it contains the most provocative statements about the certainty of manmade warming.

The bias is that whatever the IPCC and its defenders claim, the Washington Post and most other outlets report without scrutiny. Meanwhile, the motives and sources of all sceptics are instantly suspected and derided.

There's nothing wrong with scrutinizing the motives of people engaged in a dicey debate. The subjectivity arises from scrutinizing only one side and always with a preconceived notion of what you are going to find.

Such bias is typical, though, of the climate debate, and not just among reporters and editors.

Two weeks ago, I wrote a column that was provocatively titled, "Forget global warming: Welcome to the New Ice Age." In it, I explained that, far from being warming activists, some solar scientists see the recent downturn in solar activity as harbinger of a coming Ice Age.

I wondered how come we don't hear about that in equal measure with the claims of an impending meltdown?

I received over 1,800 e-mails, most of them complimentary. A large number, though, were as hysterical and vicious as any I have received on any subject in almost two decades in journalism.

How could I not believe? Was I being dishonest or just stupid? How much had EXXON paid me? Until I could write in favour of the warming theorists, I should "go back into your oil company-funded bubble. You @*/x-ing hack."

And that was from a climate scientist at a major university.

At last week's Manhattan climate conference, delegate after delegate related stories about how they had been denied tenure, shut out of scientific conferences and rejected by academic journals because no matter how scrupulous their research, their conclusions disagreed with the prevailing orthodoxy of the Climate Change Pharisees. They spoke, too, of colleagues too afraid for their jobs even to turn up at the conference.

I don't believe we are headed for an ice age any more than we're hurtling towards a meltdown. But we are in the midst of overwhelming bias in favour of the meltdown side.



Borowitz Report

Spitzer: I've Been Screwed

NY Guv Answers Prostitution Charges

Embattled New York Governor Eliot Spitzer held a hastily scheduled press conference to answer charges that he patronized a prostitution ring, telling reporters, "I've been screwed."

While Mr. Spitzer refused to elaborate on his comment, he added for emphasis, "I've been screwed and it's cost me a lot."

Aides to the New York governor applauded him for responding quickly to the charges but across the state political observers wondered if he had raised more questions than he had answered.

Mr. Spitzer, who has endorsed Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-NY), did receive a vote of support from her husband, former President Bill Clinton, who offered to "take over his position" if the governor is forced to step down.

"I am happy to perform all of the roles that Eliot has been performing," Mr. Clinton said, adding that he had the experience to make crucial phone calls at 3 A.M.

American Digest.com

[Spitzer's Wife Silda Joins Democrat Pissed-Off Wives Club, Plans Senate Bid](#)



Dead man walking.

They shouted at him, as the Spitzers split from the press conference, "Governor, will you resign? Will you resign?" Silly journalists. Any sharp pundit would have gotten up in Mrs. Spitzer's face and asked, "Does this mean you are going to run for the U.S. Senate?" I'm looking for Oprah to do that job when she has the Spitzers on to talk about "the healing process."

[Reached for comment, Martha Stewart would say only:](#)



DealBreaker

[Eliot Spitzer Vows To Crack Down On Excess Prostitute Pay](#)

Posted by John Carney

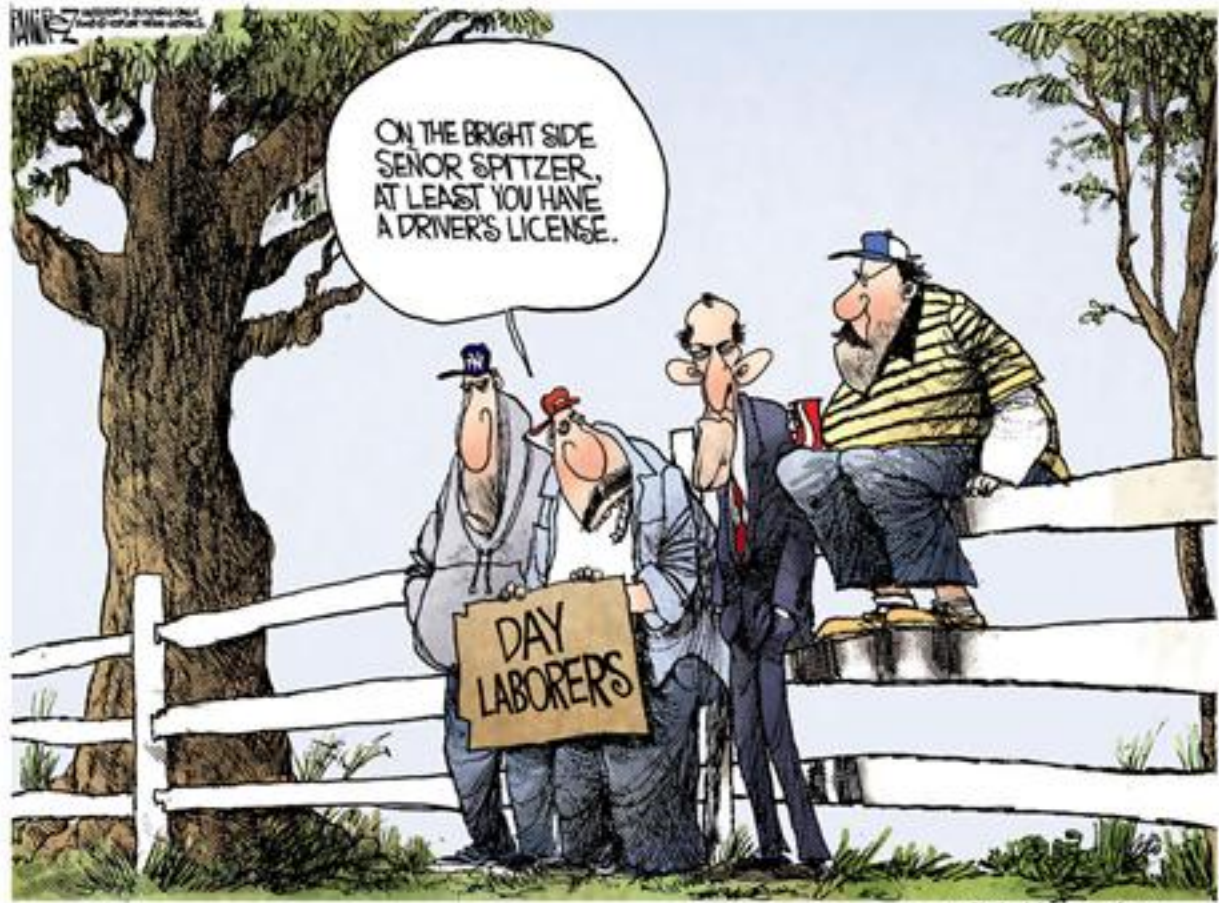
Discovering that the exclusive international ring of prostitutes known as the "Emperor's Club" charged up to \$5,500 an hour for their services, New York governor Eliot Spitzer vowed to put an end to this price gouging practice.

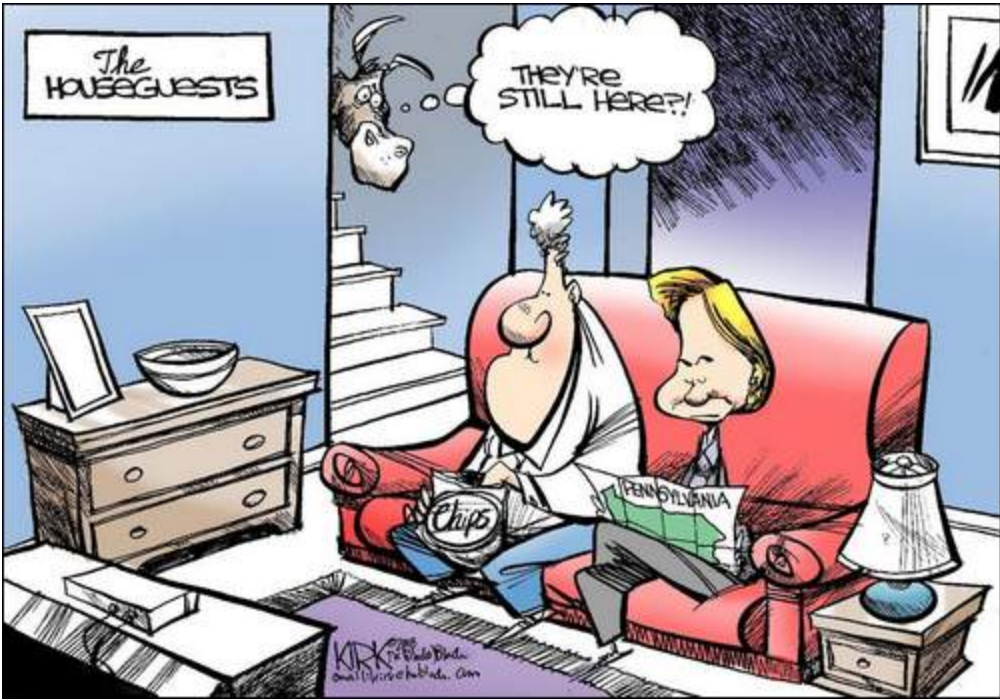
Four people alleged to have run the "Emperor's Club" were charged with conspiracy to violate federal prostitution statutes, while two of them were also charged with laundering more than \$1 million in illegal proceeds.

"That kind of excessive compensation is simply outrageous. Prostitution is allegedly a victimless crime," Spitzer said in a press conference that took place only in our imaginations. "But now we see that its customers can become its victims."

Spitzer added it was especially shameful that one of the most trusted names in prostitution had engaged in this shocking betrayal and rank greed.







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