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Victimless crime?

It can be said of many others in politics who have fallen prey to their own character flaws, but it applies in particular to Eliot Spitzer, the soon-former governor of New York:

Oh, what might have been.

Spitzer made a career of going after corporate wrongdoers as New York attorney general and even after prostitution rings as a prosecutor. His crusades made him a rising star in Democratic circles.

Now, he is just another former politician felled by tawdry — and we might add, illegal — behavior.

Spitzer on Wednesday announced that he is resigning, the only move left to him once his dalliances with high-priced call girls divested him of any credibility, hence no ability to achieve anything in Albany. The only question in our mind is why he didn't resign a day earlier. He should have done so as soon as the behavior was known.

Spitzer's past targets and political enemies are, no doubt, relishing his downfall. The crusading do-gooder was not so good after all.

But our view is that, like a well-known philanderer in high office before him, sully behavior in one sphere does not necessarily mean lack of accomplishment in others.

What prompted this behavior? Hubris surely.

Prostitution is said to be a victimless crime. Not strictly true. Our hearts go out to Spitzer's wife, Silda, and their three daughters.

— *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

Ohio's the key

WASHINGTON — Were it not for the 12th Amendment, ratified on June 15, 1804, presidential nominees could, and probably would prefer to, run alone, without being saddled with pesky vice presidential running mates, who can be embarrassments. Unfortunately, the presidential election of 1800 happened.

It was "a magnificent catastrophe" (that is the title of a splendid new book on it, by Edward J. Larson of Pepperdine University). As the two-party system, unanticipated by the Constitution's otherwise farsighted Framers, was crystallizing, Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr each received the same number of electoral votes. This made a hash of the Framers' plan for electing presidents without having vice presidential candidates. Under their plan, which worked fine for three elections, the presidential candidate with the second highest number of electoral votes — John Adams twice, then Jefferson — became vice president.

It took the House of Representatives until Feb. 17, 1801, and 36 ballots, to break the Jefferson-Burr tie and make Jefferson president. Which is why, before the 1804 election, the 12th Amendment was written to require that electoral votes shall be cast "for president and vice president" with the expectation that the candidates would run on a party ticket and why Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton will need a running mate.

They both might need the same white man. Or perhaps Obama will need a different one. In any case, consider the probable logic of their choices.

Presidential politics, like football, is simple in objective but complex in execution. The game is Get to 270 — electoral votes, that is. A person who captures a presidential nomination gives (sometimes perfunctory) thought to whether or not this or that potential running mate might make a cracker-jack president (John Nance Garner? Henry Wallace? Alben Barkley? John Sparkman? Estes Kefauver? Bill Miller? Spiro Agnew?). Then the presidential nominee gives *serious* thought to whether this or that running mate might contribute a winning edge in a closely contested state with a significant number of electoral votes. So, speaking of Ohio, ...

In 2000, George W. Bush beat Al Gore 271-266 in electoral votes. Had Bush not carried Ohio, which he did with 50 percent of the popular vote, he would have lost. In 2004, he beat Kerry 286-251. Without Ohio's 20 electoral votes, which Bush won 51-49, Kerry would be president. By various scandals and ineptitudes, Ohio's Republican Party made such a mess that in 2006 Sherrod Brown, a congressman, defeated an incumbent Republican senator, Mike DeWine, and another congressman, Ted Strickland, became

governor.

Obama needs a running mate who is older than he is (46), who is not in Washington, who has executive experience and national security experience, who comes from a swing state and from a demographic cohort that Democratic presidential candidates have lost in every election since 1964 — white males. Strickland, who will be 67 in August, is the son of a steelworker and the first Democrat elected to Ohio's governorship since 1986. He is an ordained Methodist minister who was born and raised in, and represented in Congress, conservative southeastern Appalachian Ohio. He has everything Obama needs — even an A rating from the National Rifle Association — except national security experience.

Clinton, too, needs Ohio, and owes Strickland, who helped her win in the primary. In politics, gratitude is optional, but a pleasant surprise.

Where would McCain make up for losing Ohio's electoral votes? Perhaps he could turn New Hampshire back to red: He has twice won its primary, and it was one of only three states — the others were Iowa and New Mexico — which changed partisan alignment between 2000 and 2004 (when Kerry won with 50 percent). But New Hampshire has just four electoral votes. Perhaps another 16 can be found somewhere, but going into the fall with Ohio out of reach would put McCain in a deep hole.

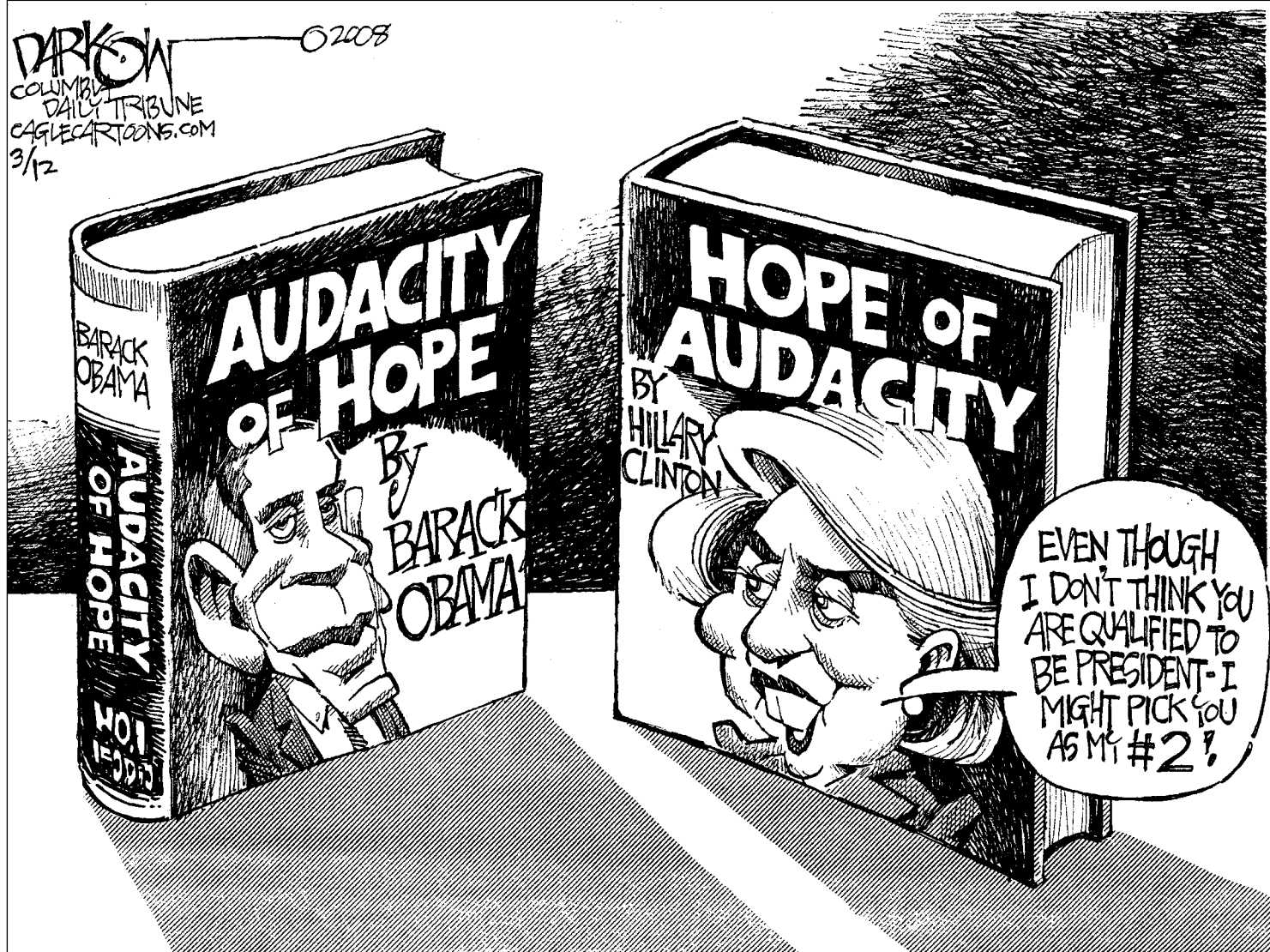
If, however, McCain, whose strongest feelings and only competence concern national security, succeeds in making this a national security election — if he does not, he almost certainly loses — Obama could consider a different running mate: Sam Nunn, 69, the former four-term senator from Georgia. Winning the state's 15 electoral votes in November would be difficult even with Nunn on the ticket. Still, the value of running with Nunn, who chaired the Senate Armed Services Committee, would be substantial.

But not more substantial than the benefits from putting Ohio, in August, out of McCain's November reach. That would free Obama's or Clinton's time and money for use elsewhere and compel McCain to wager time and money on other, and problematic, states. The choice of Strickland would be, in military terminology, a force multiplier.

George Will is a syndicated columnist.



GEORGE WILL



Newton super must answer questions

Editor:

At Tuesday's meeting of the Newton Board of Education, Superintendent Mark Miller made a promise to the community. He promised to read every letter addressed to him at future board of education meetings.

As his concern for the future of his employment grows, he chose to read several letters praising him at the meeting. The problem is that he chose not to read any of the countless letters questioning his leadership and judgment. After being questioned about the absence of those letters, he promised to read all letters addressed to him at future meetings.

Many members of the community remember that during the course of the board meeting on Feb. 26, Mr. Miller did not have the courage to answer a single question posed by the more than 200 members of the public in attendance.

Some of the many questions that were met with silence included seemingly simple inquiries about leadership, vision and decision making. Surely the superintendent should be able to express his views on these general questions that he presumably draws upon regularly when making decisions for the school district.

The superintendent's past refusal to engage in a dialogue with the community serves the interests of no one. Teachers are without a contract, the future for students is in jeopardy, and Mr. Miller lacks the courage to answer simple questions from the public.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I encourage all concerned citizens to send letters to Mr. Miller asking for answers to your questions. Remember that he has promised to read all of your letters at the upcoming board meetings instead of selectively choosing letters that suit his goal of maintaining his employment. The next meeting is scheduled for March 25 at 7 p.m.

Address your letters to Newton Board of Education, Attention: Superintendent Mark Miller, 57 Trinity St., Newton, NJ 07860.

Bryant Avondoglio
 Newton

The writer is a 2004 Newton High School graduate and former Student Council president.

Does politics play part in cuts at Ag?

Editor:

I totally agree with Gov. Corzine's statement in his annual budget address that, "Frankly, New Jersey has a government its people cannot afford." I'm sure we all agree that we must reduce state spending to solve our fiscal problems.

One of his proposed cuts would be the elimination of the Department of Agriculture. Although the governor talked of abolishing the agency, it has been reported that the functions of the department will remain in place as its duties are integrated into the departments of Environmental Protec-

tion and Health and Senior Services.

Budget figures released after his speech show that actual spending on its agricultural programs would go down by only 18 percent. What will be terminated is the cabinet position of the secretary of agriculture and his staff. The secretary of agriculture, who is appointed by the Board of Agriculture, is the only one of 21 cabinet positions not appointed by the governor. How will the farmers of New Jersey be represented in the future?

Could the fact that Charles Kuperus, our secretary of agriculture, is the only Republican member of the Cabinet and the only member not appointed by the governor, have more influence on Corzine's decision than the minimal budget cut? I think so.

Richard Vohden
 Green

Greedy home buyers partly responsible

Editor:

I would like to express my concern with the reporting of the mortgage foreclosure crisis. Every report and article I've read consistently misses the true problem — the homeowner who signed the loan. The reporting nearly always blames the mortgage company, the real estate company or the developer. The truth is, no one forced the home-

owner to accept the loan and terms. If the homeowner was foolish enough not to investigate the long-term aspects of the mortgage, well shame on them.

When a homeowner accepts a mortgage of interest-payment-only to buy a home they could not normally afford, that is shortsighted. When they plan on the equity increase in the home to level out the mortgage payment, that is unwise speculation. Then to use that home equity to buy expensive toys is greed.

I was taught long ago that we should look before we leap, think and read before we sign, and live within our means. I guess many in my generation missed these lessons.

My generation has reversed the meaning of a home from a foundation for families and lives, to a money-making venture. If these people who lost their homes used their mortgage to purchase cars, motorcycles, boats or other toys and non-essential things, then they bear all the blame. Let's not forget that in a free society, we are all responsible for our own lives. If people lost their homes due to illness or other tragic events, then they deserve our compassion. The mortgage companies should understand and find some common ground to complete the mortgage.

When people expect the government to jump in to save them from greed and their own ignorance, they walk a very slippery slope.

Michael F. Brucker
 Hampton

A fall of biblical proportions

Franklin Delano Roosevelt once commented that "the presidency is not merely an administrative office. That's the least of it ... It is preeminently a place of moral leadership." The same could be said of any office served by an elected official.

The people, by way of the voting booth, willingly give away their power as individuals to lawmakers. In so doing, it is hoped that they will live up to a high standard of trust and ethics. It is after all why presidents and other elected officials raise their right hand while placing the other on a Bible and promise to comport themselves well.

This week's revelations of New York State's governor Eliot Spitzer's alleged involvement in a call-girl scandal followed by his resignation on Wednesday is the latest example of a public and very powerful politician caught in debauched, extramarital behavior. Mr. Spitzer has, through his own arrogance, disgraced himself, his family, and the people who elected him to serve as their governor.

Powerful politicians falling

from grace into immorality while serving the public trust is an old story. It certainly didn't begin with Bill Clinton and the Monica Lewinsky in the Oval Office.

Israel's King David was characterized as a man "after the heart of God." One evening, when he should have been leading his troops in battle as Israel's acting Commander-in-Chief, he was instead idling away his time on a rooftop. He glanced across the way and there was a woman bathing. He decided he couldn't resist. The result of his affair with Bathsheba led to her pregnancy and an attempted cover-up that included David arranging the murder of her husband followed by the modern-day equivalents of obstruction of justice and perjury.

His son Solomon wrestled with similar moral problems. Although his wisdom was sought by rulers from all over the world — the Queen of Sheba remarked that only "the half had been told" — still, he was a man who could not be satisfied with

one woman. According to the record in the First Book of Kings, he had "seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines ... (which) turned his heart away."

There has not been much sympathy for Mr. Spitzer's meteoric spiral downward. In fact, it's been just the opposite. Before the smoke cleared from the crater, the word "schadenfreude" — joy over one's shame — had been voiced over and over again. A cheer went up from the floor of the New York Stock Exchange as he announced his resignation. Mr. Spitzer had led a crusade against a number of Wall Street firms that was characterized as heavy-handed and that resulted in the destruction of the reputations of a number of innocent

people. It is no stretch to say that he was hated by not just a few.

But vengeance is something that we should respect as being the purview of God and not mere mortals like us. Let the legal system decide if it wants to charge Mr. Spitzer with any crimes.

In his resignation speech, Mr. Spitzer said, "From those to whom much is given, much is expected," words first spoken by Jesus Christ in Luke's Gospel (12:48). Certainly Mr. Spitzer, a man to whom much has been given, has failed to live up to expectations.

But before the rest of us rush to judgment, let us ponder our own moral peril. Jesus also warned "Everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." If this were the standard against which all of us were to be judged, there would be not one among us left standing.

Gregory J. Rummo is a syndicated columnist.



GREGORY RUMMO

Doonesbury



BY GARRY TRUDEAU