

Paul Krugman - New York Times Blog

July 12, 2013, 8:41 am

Spitzer

I was on the Upper West Side yesterday, and you had to walk carefully to avoid the teeming masses of people trying to get you to sign up to get Eliot Spitzer on the ballot for comptroller. And it looks as if the effort succeeded.

So, is this absurd? I don't think so.

Full disclosure: I happen to know and like Spitzer personally; also, at least some of the talks I've given at the 92nd Street Y were sponsored by the Spitzer family. So you can discount what I'm about to say appropriately.

So, first and stupid things first: the prostitute thing is embarrassing and painful to think about, but not a disqualification for public office. David Vitter is still in the Senate, and in internal LA Republican politics is apparently squashing the very pious Bobby Jindal like a bug.

A more important point is that Spitzer was, it turned out, temperamentally unsuited to the job of governor. He's a bulldog who sinks his teeth into those he sees as wrongdoers and won't let go. This worked for him as Attorney General, but got him nowhere in running the state.

The point, however, is that the office he's now seeking is more like the AG position than the governor's mansion. And it would give him, once again, a chance to tangle with the bad guys of Wall Street from a position of considerable influence.

I know that opinions differ about just how effective Spitzer's confrontations were. But at least he tried — which is more than you can say about almost anyone else in our political life. Basically, the malefactors of great leverage were bailed out and went right back to being bad guys again, and everyone in public life pretended that nothing had happened.

That, I think, is why there's a surprising reservoir of support for Spitzer; people remember him as someone who showed at least some of the righteous outrage that has been so wrongly absent from our national discourse.

It's a useful reminder, and it's why I regard his entry into the race, win or lose, as a good thing.

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