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How scandal shot down Spitzer the 'sheriff'

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[Eliot Spitzer](#) has won a place in the history books for giving reform a bad name.

Good government ... Ethical government ... Clean government ... Transparent government ... Day one, everything changes ... Steamroller for the people.

Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

In his elected time he talked, he pointed the finger, he preached, he denounced, and he called up others and threatened. Now that he has evidently earned the designation "Client 9" in a federal affidavit involving prostitution charges, Spitzer's political life is over.

Those power brokers who once saw Spitzer as a threat, as the sheriff of Wall Street, the steamroller against those corrupt embodiments of the status quo, can all breathe easy and raise a posthumous toast to reform.

For now, the prostitution allegations to which Spitzer is tied suggest he may have taken more earnest care in procuring services of the Emperors Club VIP ring than he has in negotiating this year's state budget.

Maybe even now you could argue a point in Spitzer's favor. He avoided adding to the hypocrisy of his actions by supporting [New York](#) business. After all, the Emperors Club job creation seems to have been local -- according to the feds, the company's representative was sent from Penn Station to meet him in Washington, D.C.

One name on the lips of shocked observers yesterday was Jim McGreevey, the former [New Jersey](#) governor whose incumbency exploded with the same suddenness less than four years ago after he admitted an extramarital affair with a male employee.

But Hank Sheinkopf, the New York Democratic consultant who has handled such crises, made a salient point. "This is worse," he said, "because McGreevey was never seen as a guy who would dictate what moral behavior was."

"Having been through the meltdown of public people, I can tell you it is never pleasant," he said.

"Americans are very tolerant of the sex lives of their leaders," added Mitchell Moss, professor in [New York University's](#) Wagner School of Public Service. "This was not a

romantic relationship -- but one involving a criminal enterprise."

Spitzer's story could have a bit less resonance and invoke a bit more sympathy, maybe, if not for all the sanctimony. Remember how abruptly he ran from Alan Hevesi when it became clear the Democratic comptroller, his 2006 ticket mate, was misusing state resources to take care of his ailing wife?

Remember how he once put down [Rudy Giuliani](#) as the city's Girolamo Savonarola, recalling the 15th-century Dominican reformer and moral crusader who was eventually executed?

Remember journalist Charles Gasparino's revelation last November of Spitzer's attorney-general office grilling stock exchange chairman Richard Grasso on whether he had an extramarital affair and fathered a love child?

Spitzer's wife Silda stood at his side during the reading of his short apologetic statement yesterday, looking bereaved, face puffy, eyes downward or watching as he read. Spitzer, facing everyone and no one, eyes moving but opaque, read his vague statement with just a measure more adrenaline than you'd expect for a ceremony honoring the history of the Erie Canal. "We sought to bring real change to New York, and that will continue," he said.

On an unnamed "personal matter," he apologized to his family and the state, and said he acted in a way "that violates my, or any, sense of right or wrong." He declined questions, saying, "I will report back to you in short order" -- whatever that meant.

Then he was done, leaving all the reform talk for someone else, some other time.