

Lou Dobbs Crusades Against Spitzer's Driver's License Plan for Illegal Immigrants

The New York Times

October 17, 2007 Wednesday, Late Edition - Final

Copyright 2007 The New York Times Company

Section: Section B; Column 0; Metropolitan Desk; Pg. 3

Length: 806 words

Byline: By NICHOLAS CONFESSORE

Dateline: ALBANY, Oct. 16

Body

The CNN anchor **Lou Dobbs** calls Gov. Eliot Spitzer "a genius." But not in a nice way.

"I was being about as facetious as one could be," Mr. **Dobbs** said in an interview Tuesday as he prepared for his nightly broadcast, "**Lou Dobbs** Tonight." For the last nine days, the show has included discussion of Mr. **Spitzer's plan** to allow **illegal immigrants** to apply for **driver's licenses**.

Mr. **Dobbs**, a pinstriped journalist turned populist crusader **against illegal** immigration, is not a fan.

"It's an abuse of power!" Mr. **Dobbs** thundered. "He is being absolutely irresponsible. When the governor of New York embarks on this kind of irresponsibility, it is national news as far as I'm concerned."

And when Mr. **Dobbs** -- whose broadcast is CNN's second-highest-rated show -- speaks, many people listen. His relentless mockery of Mr. **Spitzer's** decision has thrust the **driver's license** policy onto the national stage, helping fuel an uproar not only among New Yorkers, but among national groups opposed to **illegal** immigration as well.

As it happens, Mr. **Dobbs** was recovering from a tonsillectomy when Mr. Spitzer announced the policy on Sept. 21. But the anchorman went on the attack almost immediately after going back on the air Oct. 8, saying it was "hard to imagine what this governor is thinking."

It only took him another week to conclude that Mr. Spitzer, in fact, was not thinking at all. "This governor is a genius," he proclaimed disgustedly on Monday. "An overwhelming majority of New York voters oppose the governor, but he refuses to back down."

With the television set on mute, the scrunch alone of Mr. **Dobbs's** brow conveys his belief that Mr. **Spitzer's** new policy is, possibly, the dumbest idea in the history of dumb ideas.

"I think he's definitely had an effect," said State Senator Martin J. Golden, a Brooklyn Republican who was on Mr. **Dobbs's** show on Sunday to denounce the **plan**. "Everybody's chiming in. I get e-mails from across the country because of **Lou Dobbs**. I got an e-mail from a soldier in Iraq saying, 'Go for it, Golden, keep it up.'"

Mr. Golden is one of several New York elected officials -- most of them with more experience on New York 1 than on CNN -- who have been recent guests on Mr. **Dobbs's** show. Many have expressed support for proposals by state lawmakers to overturn the **license** policy or to deny funding for it.

But not everyone who goes on gets supportive e-mail messages.

Lou Dobbs Crusades Against Spitzer's Driver's License Plan for Illegal Immigrants

Jose M. Serrano, a Democratic state senator who represents parts of Manhattan and the Bronx, appeared with Mr. Golden to defend Mr. Spitzer's policy, but found himself under a verbal barrage from both the host and his fellow guest. "Oh my goodness, that was something else," Mr. Serrano said. "I think it was my first time on national television. I wound up debating both of them -- Lou paid very little attention to Marty Golden and instead just kind of dug in on me."

This next morning, Mr. Serrano said, his office was bombarded with angry e-mail messages from around the country.

"One guy wrote, 'We will derail the illegal gravy train from within,'" he said. "I don't really know what that means. Another person said, 'Go back to Mexico, you're obviously Mexican.'" (Mr. Serrano is from Puerto Rico.) "I'm not naive, but I was still surprised at the level of ignorance," Mr. Serrano said.

(Mr. Dobbs's correspondents have also stated on the air that illegal immigrants will need only a foreign passport to obtain a driver's license, and that Mr. Spitzer's policy was instituted through executive order, neither of which is true.)

Mr. Dobbs's guests and interviewees are typically opponents of the policy. A segment that Mr. Dobbs pitched on Thursday as "a lively debate" on the issue, for example, featured the host and two members of the State Assembly who oppose the governor's plan, along with a viewers' poll on whether Mr. Spitzer should be recalled. (Ninety-seven percent said yes.)

One person who has not made an appearance on Mr. Dobbs's show, despite repeated invitations, is the governor himself. Christine Anderson, a spokeswoman for Mr. Spitzer, said scheduling problems had prevented the governor from appearing. The administration had made other officials available to Mr. Dobbs's bookers, she said, including Michael A. L. Balboni, the governor's top Homeland Security aide. But the show's producers had declined.

"We don't really have a position about his show," Ms. Anderson said. "That said, facts matter, and what we have endeavored to do throughout this entire debate is to make an argument about the safety and security benefits to doing this."

But Mr. Dobbs said that Mr. Spitzer, and Mr. Spitzer alone, is responsible for defending his new policy.

"The man hasn't shown the gumption to come on the air and debate the issue with me," Mr. Dobbs said.

<http://www.nytimes.com>

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: LICENSES & PERMITS (89%); GOVERNORS (89%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (88%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (78%); INTERVIEWS (78%); JOURNALISM (78%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (78%); IMMIGRATION (76%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (76%); DRIVERS LICENSES (75%)

Industry: TELEVISION INDUSTRY (90%); DRIVERS LICENSES (75%); ELECTRONIC MAIL (64%)

Person: ELIOT SPITZER (79%)

Lou Dobbs Crusades Against Spitzer's Driver's License Plan for Illegal Immigrants

Geographic: NEW YORK, NY, USA (71%); NEW YORK, USA (94%); IRAQ (73%)

Load-Date: October 17, 2007

End of Document