

## **SPITZER IS JUST BEYOND BELIEF**

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**Byline:** BY BILL HAMMOND

### **Body**

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New School President and former U.S. Sen. Bob Kerrey (D-Neb.) once described Bill Clinton as "an unusually good liar." Well, Gov. **Spitzer** is an unusually bad one.

The hedges, half-truths and howlers **Spitzer** is spouting to explain his U-turn on driver's licenses for illegal immigrants are fooling no one - except maybe the governor himself.

The truth of the matter is that **Spitzer** caved, big-time, to overwhelming popular opposition. Instead of offering a single ID card to all New York residents, both legal and illegal - which was his original plan - he's now proposing a complicated three-tiered system that relegates illegals to the bottom tier.

It's a defensible compromise, similar to what this column recommended last week. It gives the 1 million illegals living in New York a right to drive, brings New York into compliance with security standards in the federal Real ID Act and - last, but not least - shows a healthy respect for the 72% of New Yorkers who opposed his earlier plan.

But **Spitzer** needs to be honest in defending his course correction. Instead, he digs himself deeper into a hole.

First, he absurdly refuses to admit that his new position is a compromise, let alone a flip-flop. He told The New York Times that the deal he announced with U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff on Saturday was "not at all a shift." The Times found that so convincing that it began the next day's story with the words, "In a major shift . . ."

Then **Spitzer** wrote in an Op-Ed piece for the Daily News that "New Yorkers will have the option of three secure licenses - meeting the standards established by Real ID." In fact, the federal law specifically says licenses issued to illegal immigrants do not meet Real ID standards. That's why **Spitzer** must print "not valid for federal purposes" on the third-tier licenses he's making available to illegals.

But **Spitzer's** biggest whopper is claiming a seal of approval from the Bush administration. A statement the governor issued Sunday called it "the plan the Department of Homeland Security has endorsed" - strongly implying that the feds were okay with licenses for illegals.

Here's what Chertoff actually said: "I don't endorse giving licenses to people who are not here legally, but federal law does allow states to make that choice."

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Fibs big and small are nothing new for this governor. What my colleague Michael Goodwin calls **Spitzer's** "shaky relationship with the truth" goes back at least to his run for attorney general in 1994, when he skirted the law to accept millions in campaign loans from his father and lied to cover that up.

Sometimes it's **just** particularly unconvincing political spin, as when he claimed victory in this year's budget negotiations. In truth, Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno had him for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Then there was his statement that his office "fully cooperated" with Attorney General Andrew Cuomo's investigation of the Troopergate affair - when he knew full well that two of his top aides, on the advice of his lawyer, had refused to be questioned.

The real story came out - convincing virtually everyone that **Spitzer** had something to hide and helping inflate what should have been a minor flap into a paralyzing months-long scandal.

It's getting to the point where no one can trust what he says anymore. Certainly not the Senate Democrats, who cast politically risky votes last week in defense of **Spitzer's** one-license-for-all plan, based on his word - only to find out later that he was deep in negotiations with Chertoff at the time.

The worst thing is **Spitzer** seems to buy his own line. Asked last week about gridlock in Albany, widely viewed as the worst ever, **Spitzer** said, "Things are moving ahead in a spectacular manner."

If you say so, governor.

[whammond@nydailynews.com](mailto:whammond@nydailynews.com)

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