



**Newsday, March 12, 2008**

*NY Gov. Spitzer making infamous history as governor*

*By Michael Virtanen*

ALBANY, N.Y. — Eliot Spitzer's dizzying fall from power in the grip of a call-girl scandal is unprecedented in the 230 years since George Clinton became the first New York governor.

The nearest likeness is Gov. William Sulzer, who was impeached and removed in 1913 over his campaign records. But many historians believe Sulzer, a sometimes abrasive reformer like Spitzer, was railroaded by Tammany Hall political bosses.

Spitzer resigned Wednesday after being named as a client of a high-priced prostitution ring.

His plummet from the state's highest office was especially stunning since the former crusading state attorney general was once touted as the next in line among state leaders who enjoyed national influence.

**"I don't believe any previous governor was involved in a scandal like this, but I believe most importantly, certainly in the era of strong governors, this is by far the most shocking development we've seen,"** said Robert Ward, deputy director of the Rockefeller Institute of Government.

**Ward reeled off powerful New York governors to whom a pre-scandal Spitzer was often compared: Teddy Roosevelt, Al Smith and Nelson Rockefeller.**

**"And Eliot Spitzer came in holding the promise of being another Rockefeller in his impact on the state,"** Ward said. **"Obviously, that did not happen."**

Others in that prestigious line include Franklin Roosevelt (four term president), Thomas Dewey (crime-busting U.S. attorney), Charles Evan Hughes

(Supreme Court justice) and Mario Cuomo (lofty orator, liberal icon). Four New York governors have gone on to be president: Both Roosevelts, Martin Van Buren and Grover Cleveland.

Other elected officials have been hurt by sex scandals. President Clinton denied having sexual relations with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky, only to be forced into a humiliating reversal. He was impeached by the House and then acquitted in a 1999 Senate trial.

New Jersey Gov. Jim McGreevey resigned after acknowledging an affair with male aide. Sen. Larry Craig of Idaho pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct after being accused of soliciting sex in a Minneapolis airport men's room. Craig insisted his actions were misconstrued and he refused to resign.

Spitzer, a Democrat, was elected in 2006 with almost 70 percent of the vote, largely on a strident campaign to reform all that ailed a dysfunctional Albany. After early successes enacting workers' compensation, budget and ethics reforms, he spent much of 2007 in conflict with Republican lawmakers. Most of the year, Spitzer was bogged down by a plot hatched by aides to use the state police to track the travels of his political rival in an effort to discredit him.

But Troopergate, as the tabloids dubbed that early scandal, was nothing compared to what unfolded this week.

Democratic Assemblyman John McEneny of Albany, a political historian, agreed that New York has never seen a fall like Spitzer's. It's more typical for governors here, like Rockefeller, to leave in pursuit of national office or else retire. He was the last to leave office before his term expired. Since 1777, the state has had 54 governors, and only Sulzer previously was forced out.

**“I think particularly there have been few if any governors that have entered office with the hopes that the people placed in Eliot Spitzer, and you might say that no one started as high and no one, unfortunately, finished so low,” Ward said.**

**Sulzer made a brief comeback. The year after his removal, he was elected to the Assembly as an independent. “He ultimately was vindicated by the voters,” Ward said.**