

During the two weeks leading up to Cuomo's report, Spitzer and his aides did their best to spread rumors - in the political community and among the press - that I was merely carrying water for Bruno, lying about the facts, engaging in a crusade against a "progressive" Democrat, and supposedly compromised by some unspecified relationship.

When Cuomo's report came out, Spitzer claimed his office had cooperated fully with the attorney general.

But the next day, we learned his chief-of-staff and his communications director hadn't cooperated at all. One may, in fact, have lied under oath.

In the weeks that followed, Spitzer repeatedly claimed to have answered every question about the scandal, and law-enforcement sources said he then pressured Albany DA David Soares to issue a report absolving him of responsibility.

Now there's considerable evidence that - surprise - Spitzer was in on the plot from the start.

His penchant for hypocrisy first started to become clear to me during his second term as attorney general.

As he declared war on Wall Street and other corporate abusers, Spitzer also declared war in effect on his own oath of office: a commitment to the state and federal constitutional guarantees of the presumption of innocence.

Time after time with high-profile corporate officials - most conspicuously, former American International Group CEO Maurice "Hank" Greenberg - Spitzer railed on national television that his targets had broken the law.

But in most cases - after the damage to reputations was already done - no charges were brought.

From the start of his term, I spotted signs of trouble:

* Spitzer told me that - in a gesture of openness - he would lift some of the harsh "Fort Pataki" security that had been imposed on the Capitol - well before the 9/11 attacks - to help then-Gov. George Pataki avoid contacts with the public.

Spitzer never did that, either.

* Another tip-off came when Spitzer "reformed" the state's old Ethics and Lobbying commissions. But Spitzer's supposed reform put the formerly semi-independent agencies directly under the governor's control.

Asked why he had done that, Spitzer bluntly responded, "Because I wanted it" that way.

The Ethics Commission's failure to thoroughly investigate the Dirty Tricks Scandal might explain the "wisdom" of his actions.

* Shortly before he took office, I heard Spitzer and his aides speak contemptuously of Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, the governor's most important legislative ally, as the battle over a new state comptroller emerged.

I thought at the time, "If he's going to war with Silver before he even takes office, how can he hope to win legislative support for his programs?"

Got that one right!

* I saw and heard Spitzer's nastiness on Inauguration Day, Jan. 1, 2007, when he gratuitously insulted

Pataki to his face by comparing his 12 years in office to the 20-year slumber of Rip Van Winkle.

Later that month, I spoke to a stunned Assembly Minority Leader, James Tedisco, who was still recovering from the verbal tongue lashing by the newly self-declared "f- - -ing steamroller."

I thought again, "How can a governor who is battling Silver and declaring himself a steamroller ever hope to get along with what is, under our state Constitution, a co-equal branch of government?"

* In February 2007, I followed Bruno on his Valentine's Day "peace mission" as a 77-year-old Bruno marched down to the Executive Chamber with a bouquet of eight red roses meant as a friendship offering to the still-brand-new governor.

Spitzer greeted him with a gratuitously insulting crack that put the future target of the Dirty Tricks Scandal on notice that the governor was out to kill him politically. "What are these, one for each of your members?" asked the governor, referring to his determination to whittle down Bruno's even-then tenuous Senate majority.

* I certainly remember the repeated claims by Spitzer and his aides that the new governor would rein in the out-of-control influence of special-interest lobbyists that turned Albany under Pataki into a throwback to the days of Boss Tweed.

"He's not going to allow them. He's going to change all that," Spitzer's then-spokesman, Darren Dopp, told me on several occasions.

Now Dopp, after losing his job in the wake of the Dirty Tricks Scandal, works for megalobbyist Patricia Lynch, who just last Friday threw a \$1,000-a-ticket breakfast in Manhattan for Spitzer.

To me, that said it all.

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