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Do the wrong thing

Despite all the cries for change, politicians continue to betray their constituents

By KEVIN NAFF

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FROM NEW YORK to Oklahoma to Maryland, politicians demonstrated this week that they still don't get it. The ubiquitous cries for change we've heard on the campaign trail this year are clearly not being heard.

The fall of New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer (D), who once pledged to bring "passion" back to Albany, was greeted with slack-jawed expressions of shock by cable news commentators. But, really, what's so shocking? From Sen. David Vitter (R-La.) to Sen. Larry Craig (R-Idaho) to former Gov. Jim McGreevey (D-N.J.) to former President Bill Clinton (D), we've seen it all before — men so blinded by power that they forget laws apply to them, too.

Even if you believe, as I do, that prostitution is a victimless crime that shouldn't be prosecuted, the hypocrisy and arrogance of Spitzer's behavior still required that he resign. Spitzer sold himself as a squeaky-clean reformer. Whether or not you agree with state and federal laws against prostitution, they exist. And a tough-talking, sanctimonious former attorney general could not plead ignorance and ask for a pass.

Politicians were behaving badly elsewhere this week. In Oklahoma, the Victory Fund exposed state Rep. Sally Kern (R) as a homophobe, after it posted to YouTube audio of anti-gay remarks she made. In the speech, Kern described homosexuality as, "the biggest threat our nation has, even more so than terrorism or Islam." She likened homosexuality to a cancer that will "destroy this nation."

Kern's remarks are especially disturbing given the shooting death of California teen Lawrence King last month in an apparent anti-gay hate crime. Politicians who ridicule and demonize gays contribute to a culture that still says it's OK to discriminate against gays. Sadly, that mindset all too often leads to acts of physical violence perpetrated against us.

MEANWHILE, MARYLAND'S POLITICIANS continue to betray their gay constituents. After the state's high court, in a 4-3 ruling, upheld a state law limiting marriage to heterosexual couples, gay residents looked to their elected officials to right a judicial wrong. And once again, they are being let down.

While gay couples in committed, long-term relationships are still viewed as strangers under the law and remain desperately in need of a legislative remedy, lawmakers have turned their attention to more pressing matters, like banning cell phone use while driving and upholding a ban on online wine sales. This is not the behavior of courageous political leaders; it is the hallmark of cowards so desperate to hold onto power that they fear creating a ripple on the pond.

And this is in Maryland, a decidedly "blue" state where Democrats control both houses in the Assembly and the governor's mansion. It's become apparent that a full marriage rights bill is doomed and the state's lawmakers aren't even embracing the cop-out of civil unions. That's not surprising, considering the powerful Senate President Thomas V. "Mike" Miller, a Democrat, opposes civil unions.

Unfortunately, you won't hear a peep of criticism from national gay rights groups, because the

perpetrators of these wrongs in Maryland are Democrats.

AND WHAT HAPPENS when a gay person dares to criticize a Democrat for failing to keep promises and honor commitments? I got a taste of the Democratic wrath last month, after criticizing DNC Chair Howard Dean and his chief of staff, Leah Daughtry in an editorial.

In the piece, I wrote that the DNC's response to anti-gay remarks made by Gen. Peter Pace, President Bush's former chair of the Joint Chiefs, was insufficient and weak.

In response, Daughtry sent two lawyers to the Blade's offices to berate me and our publisher, Lynne Brown. The meeting was beyond contentious and featured lots of red-faced cursing and threatening of lawsuits. They claimed to represent Daughtry and not the DNC. But DNC officials have gloated behind the scenes that since the confrontation in the Blade's offices, the paper has stopped writing about a gay man's lawsuit against the party, his former employer. Donald Hitchcock accuses the DNC of firing him after his partner, Paul Yandura, publicly urged gay donors to think twice before giving money to the Democratic Party.

Of course, to suggest that the Blade would abandon a story because a couple of angry lawyers made a scene in the lobby constitutes wishful thinking. One thing every journalist learns early on is that when people start yelling and making threats, that means you're onto something.

One source told the Blade this week that in Dean's deposition in the case, he denounced the Blade as "the Fox News of gay journalism."

This is what happens to gay people who challenge Democrats to be better on our issues. Dean and others at the DNC have derided the Blade as right-wing birdcage liner. Both criticisms are absurd; no fair-minded person could reasonably consider the Blade a conservative publication and judging by the innumerable references to the Blade in the Hitchcock case depositions, DNC officials spend an inordinate amount of time worrying about what we write. They may line their birdcages with our pages, but not until they've read them cover to cover.

If the Blade is the Fox News of gay journalism, then Howard Dean is the Gomer Pyle of politicians — a national laughingstock whose amateurish stewardship of the party puts the prospect of a Democratic victory in November in doubt when it ought to be a slam-dunk.

From bigots in Oklahoma and cowards in Maryland to hypocrites in New York and petty hacks in D.C., this nation's politicians prove again and again just how out of touch they are with the people they are supposed to represent.