

NATIONAL news

OUT OF THE CLOSET, OUT OF A JOB

McGreevey steps down as New Jersey governor

by Bob Roehr

The final curtain came down on New Jersey Gov. James E. McGreevey's tenure Nov. 15, as he had promised. McGreevey had stunned the nation by announcing at an Aug. 12 news conference, "I am a gay American." His second wife and second child were by his side.

That statement was an attempt to draw attention away from the fact that McGreevey had put his male paramour, Golan Cipel, on the state payroll at a top salary, in a position for which he was not qualified. Cipel later fled the media circus to his native Israel.

A series of "he said, he said" accusations of sexual harassment and blackmail, tossed out by the Cipel and McGreevey camps, fed tabloid coverage during the ensuing weeks. Cipel denied he was gay and claimed to have resisted McGreevey's sexual advances through the years.

Federal investigators found no evidence to substantiate the charge that McGreevey had been blackmailed.

McGreevey's delayed resignation was another source of controversy, as it prevented a special election to fill out the remaining 14 months of his term. And his administration was plagued by charges of corruption.

The *Newark Star-Ledger*, the state's leading newspaper, published an exposé of McGreevey's seamy side Nov. 7 under the headline "The Governor's Secret Life." It detailed how he had developed a fondness for go-go bars and strip joints early in his political career, perhaps as a form of overcompensation for internal questions about his sexual orientation.

The bar-hopping became so commonplace that his staff developed a euphemism for it: "McGreevey is out knocking on doors in Sayreville," the location of his most frequent haunts.

A female prostitute, Myra Rosa, claimed McGreevey paid to have sex with her on numerous occasions. She began making more public noises about it during the 1997 gubernatorial campaign, and supporters paid \$5,000

for her "vacation" in Florida during the final weeks of the campaign. She died of a drug overdose in 2001.

Rumors that McGreevey was gay began circulating as early as 1989 when he was running for the state assembly. They were fueled by his divorce in 1995 and by surrounding himself with

a staff composed largely of attractive young men, who some took to calling "the lavender hill mob."

He was spotted at Studio Six, "Atlantic City's hottest gay nightspot," on at least two different Saturday nights during the 2001 campaign for governor. He always headed upstairs to the quiet VIP room.

McGreevey met Cipel while on a trade mission to Israel in March 2000, three weeks after proposing to his second wife, Dina Matos. Cipel soon

moved to New Jersey and became involved in the campaign for governor and later in senior positions within McGreevey's administration.

Cipel was frequently observed in the private quarters of the governor's mansion. After one early morning encounter, an unnamed former administration official told the *Star-Ledger*: "It was very obvious he had spent the night. You don't go to the governor's mansion with a sweat suit on. His hair was not combed. His face did not look like he washed it."

But it appears their affair turned sour, and Cipel left the administration. McGreevey financially took care of his ex by arranging jobs with political supporters, but Cipel's demands kept escalating until McGreevey and his allies could no longer buy his silence. That is when the governor called his news conference.

The McGreevey family is moving out of the governor's mansion into an apartment complex near the town of Woodbridge, where he served as mayor. □

BOB ROEHR is a free-lance reporter based in Washington, D.C.

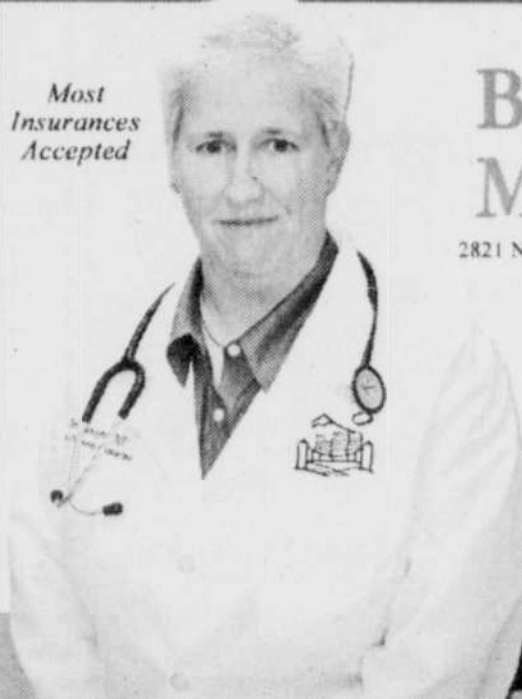


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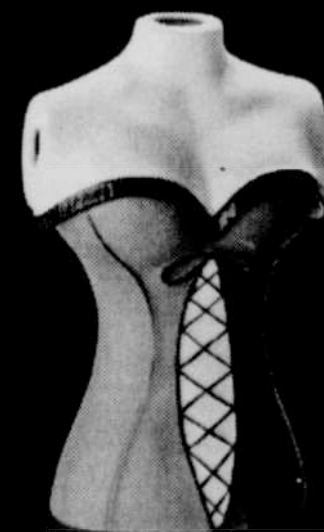
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