

The Race for Attorney General

Pirro: The A.G. Should Be a Prosecutor

Says New Yorkers need an experienced D.A. to succeed Spitzer

This is the fourth in a series of interviews with the candidates for attorney general.

By Emily Liebert

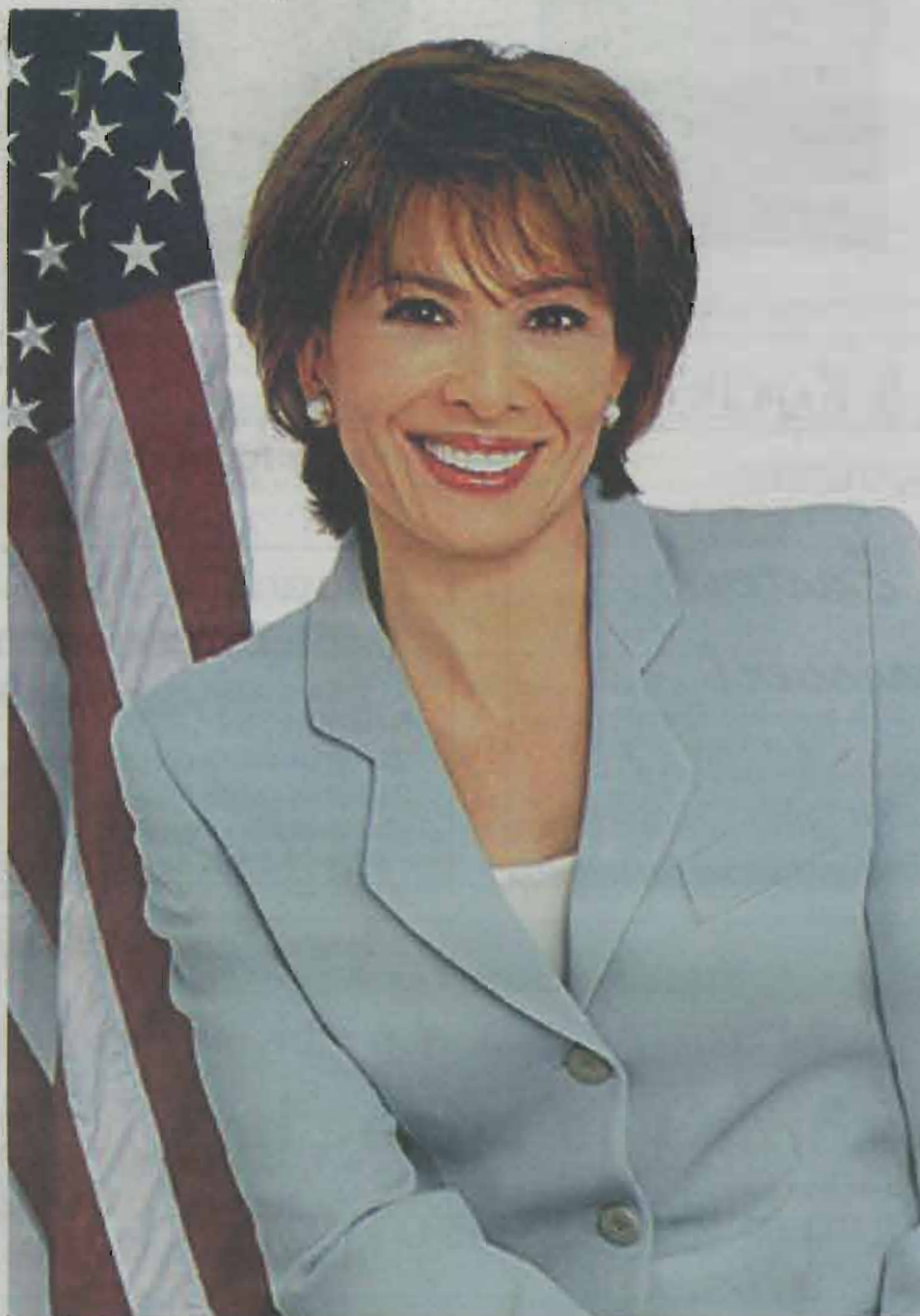
There were already six Democrats in the race for attorney general when Jeanine Pirro left a floundering Senate bid against Hillary Clinton to become the Republican candidate in the race last December. In the four months since, she has been waging a quiet but determined fight to succeed Eliot Spitzer as the state's top law enforcer, and the former Westchester County district attorney is no stranger to the ring.

Pirro began her career as a prosecutor fighting domestic and child abuse, heading one of the first domestic violence units in the nation and battling to make the criminal justice system more responsive to victims of violence in the home. In 1990, she was the first woman elected Westchester County Court judge. Three years later, she was elected Westchester County D.A., and served three terms before opting against seeking reelection last year. During that time, she also served as a president of the New York State District Attorneys Association.

Pirro recently sat down to discuss her background, her vision for the office, and her husband Al, who was convicted in 2000 of federal tax evasion.

What's the same about what qualifies you to be attorney general as would have been to be senator? What's different?

My experience — 30 years of protecting New Yorkers and successfully defending them qualifies me for a race to fight for the people of New York. My core issues — fighting for a level playing field for all New Yorkers — are the same, but in terms of the attorney general race, I am the only candidate with three decades of law enforcement experience, running for the chief law enforcement job of the state of New York. I've been a prosecutor, a judge, and the district attorney in one of the biggest counties in the state. I've also run a large legal office in a non-partisan way that has benefited the



Jeanine Pirro

oritize Medicaid fraud. It's one of the biggest issues confronting New Yorkers; it affects their pocketbooks, and I will make sure I use that office to go after the fraud and abuse that raises our property taxes. Pursuing sexual predators will be another one of my priorities.

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people of New York.

Has Eliot Spitzer been effective? What will you do differently if elected?

I think Eliot Spitzer did things that needed to be done, but every attorney general puts his or her stamp on the office. Fighting fraud and corruption is something that I've been doing my whole career. We're going to go after that fraud wherever we find it, but I'm also going to pri-

If elected, what issues will be at the top of your agenda?

Medicaid fraud, civil confinement for sexual predators, and protection of senior citizens at nursing homes. Also, environmental crimes. My office prosecuted well over eight hundred environmental crimes. The attorney general has jurisdiction over those cases. I have the experience to hit the ground running.

As a former president of the New York State District Attorneys Association, I know all sixty-two of those district attorneys. They're the lifeline of law enforcement in New York.

How do you see the road ahead?

My challenge right now is to get my record of accomplishments before the people of New York. Once they see that no one else in this race has the experience and qualifications as a prosecutor, a judge, a D.A., a mother and someone who has spent her whole career in the trenches fighting for a level playing field, they'll see there really is no comparison.

How does being a woman affect your campaign?

In the history of Westchester County, I've been the first woman to try a murder case, the first woman county judge, the first woman D.A., and the first woman president of the New York State District Attorneys Association. And I intend to be the first female attorney general in the history of New York State.

You used an internet sting operation to catch sexual predators using computers to victimize children. If elected attorney general, how will technology factor into your work?

I have been very vocal about the dangers of the social networking sites, like myspace.com. The fact that pedophiles and sexual predators are identifying our children on this 24/7 website is unacceptable. There is an internet bureau in the attorney general's office and this is an area where we are really going to focus and protect New Yorkers.

Is your husband Al involved in the campaign?

The only thing I want from my husband is support when I get home. I keep the two separate.

Do you have concerns that his past troubles will affect your race?

These are issues that have been hashed and re-hashed. The voters of New York are smart. They looked at these issues in Westchester and I was elected and re-elected. I'm a strong, independent woman who has fought her whole career to make a difference in the quality of New Yorkers' lives. Given that these issues have been rejected, the voters are going to look at the person with the most experience and that's me.

Your term as D.A. just ended. Was that difficult to leave behind?

It was a job that I loved — being able to fight for the people — and that's why I continue in this race for attorney general. I made the decision not to run for reelection because I didn't think it was fair to the people of my county. I have always been candid with the voters and I was not going to — with a wink and a nod — say I'll run and be your D.A. and then immediately run for state-wide office.