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(EX-)COMMISH LEAVES CARONA IN THE DUST

How law enforcement executives are selected is crucial

By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. With his indictment for secretly pocketing more than a half-million dollars from a mob-tainted waste disposal firm and a New York City developer, former Big Apple police commissioner Bernard Kerik has bumped our very own Sheriff [Mike Carona](#) from the #1 spot in this year's allegedly-crooked-top-cop sweepstakes.

According to the Feds, Kerik's income tax bloopers date back to 1999 when he was in charge of the New York City Department of Corrections. Kerik, a former NYPD detective, was appointed to this position by Rudy Giuliani after serving as the Mayor's driver/bodyguard. Pooh-poohing doubts about Kerik's qualifications, Giuliani then promoted him to be the city's Police Commissioner, a post the protégé held until December 2001 when his benefactor left office.

And there was more. Three years later, under pressure from -- yes -- Giuliani, President Bush nominated Kerik to head the Department of Homeland Security. Kerik had to withdraw when word leaked that he had employed an illegal alien as a nanny. Sadly, he didn't get his application form back, leading to another count in the indictment, accusing him of perjury for not disclosing his under-the-table earnings.

What are Kerik's prospects? His ability to mount a convincing defense is complicated by his 2006 plea of guilty to misdemeanors for leaving out a loan and a gift *from the same sources cited by the Feds* on his New York City conflict-of-interest reports. Despite everything, his friendship with Giuliani seems unaffected, and to this date the Presidential contender dismisses his buddy's infractions as harmless oversights.

The selections of Kerik and Carona for high-level law enforcement jobs reflect an appalling unconcern for the skills and experience required by such lofty positions. Both were plucked from obscurity: Carona, by the Orange County Republican Party; Kerik, by an influential politico. Neither had to submit to questioning by independent experts. And neither endured a rigorous pre-employment investigation (well, not until Kerik got tripped up by Homeland Security.) And just what *were* their backgrounds? Kerik had been a street cop and detective. He lacked a bachelor's degree, a requirement for promotion to NYPD management slots. Before running for Sheriff, Carona's entire career was served in the Orange County Marshal's office, a now-defunct agency whose functions were limited to process service and courtroom

security. (Carona's lack of law enforcement experience was pointedly noted in the [campaign bio](#) of his rival, Santa Ana Police Chief Paul Walters: "27 years of *real* experience, leading *real* cops, and fighting *real* crime".)

It's true that exhaustive nationwide searches, the normal practice when hiring a major city chief, don't always produce ideal results. Consider, for example, Willie Williams, whose tenure at LAPD many think a disaster. Still, rigorous screening is vastly preferable to its alternative. After suffering through the abortive nomination of Harriet Miers to the Supreme Court and the disastrous appointment of Alberto Gonzalez as Attorney General, Americans are ready for a President who doesn't need to pack his chums around him to feel secure.

Are you listening, Rudy?