

WIENERS VERSUS COAL PLANTS

Teddy says just about everything that needs to be said about Howie Kurtz's latest obsessive rantings about David Letterman's wiener. But I wanted to add one thing.

Howie says the reason the press (meaning, Howie himself) has covered Letterman's wiener obsessively and not Ensign's is because the Ensign story lacks visuals.

The Ensign story is complicated and not very visual. Letterman is far more famous. So the comic is turned into media fodder and the officeholder largely stays under the radar.

Of course, Howie complaint that Ensign's affair isn't visual enough is partly an expression of Howie's own lack of imagination. Set aside, for example, that this is Vegas, baby. Vegas?!?! Not visual enough for Howie?!?!?!?

Focus instead on the real consequences Ensign's actions might have for people totally unrelated to Ensign and his mistress and his mistress' husband. It's possible, for example, that Nevada may get a coal plant that some in the state oppose because of the ethically and potentially legally challenged work Ensign had his cuckold do.

With NV Energy, for instance, Mr. Hampton spent the summer of 2008 strategizing with John Lopez, the senator's chief of staff, about how Mr. Ensign could intervene with the Interior Department to get the coal-plant [environmental impact statement] completed, Mr. Hampton said.

In November 2008, Mr. Ensign wrote to the Interior Department secretary at the time, Dirk Kempthorne, restating his

longstanding view that the project was good for Nevada and urging the agency to publish the report.

Mr. Hampton followed up the next month with an e-mail message to Mr. Lopez, still trying to get the report released. The delay "is really hurting Nevada," he wrote.

Mr. Lopez responded the same day. "I have been pounding Interior and can't figure why this hasn't come out," his e-mail message said. "I'll call again today."

Mr. Lopez asked Matthew C. Eames, the department's director of Congressional affairs, to make inquiries. Mr. Eames, in an interview, said after that hearing repeatedly from Mr. Ensign's office, he contacted half a dozen Interior Department officials in Nevada and Washington to urge them to issue the report.

Five days after the e-mail exchange between Mr. Hampton and Mr. Lopez – on Dec 17, 2008 – the environmental impact statement was signed. (NV Energy has since put the coal plant project on hold.)

Granted, the project is on hold. But if it goes forward, Ensign's little wiener problem would bring the people of Nevada worse air, worse lungs, and environmental degradation.

Now I realize that Howie, sequestered in his affluent neighborhood in the Village, may not like to think about things like the damage coal plants do to the environment and to people's health. But it is yet another example of the way that the Village's obsessive rantings hurt real America.