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A Night Out: Roasting Stephen Colbert

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Truthiness, Jon Stewart, porn stars, and Rahm Emanuel's middle finger were all subjects of the 20th Annual Roast for Spina Bifida honoring Stephen Colbert.

By [Nicole Duncan](#) Published Monday, November 17, 2008



Stephen Colbert, Mark Shields, Orrin Hatch and Rahm Emanuel. Photo by Paul Morigi, courtesy the Spina Bifida Association.

Pundits and politicians were in attendance in the ballroom of the [Washington Hilton](#)—the same room where Colbert flayed President Bush at the Correspondents' Dinner two years ago. The event, which included a silent auction, raffle, dinner, and roast, raised more than \$450,000 for the Spina Bifida Association.

"We're hosting the great Stephen Colbert, but I guess we couldn't get Jon Stewart," quipped press secretary Dana Perino, causing Colbert to pour himself a tall glass of wine. For someone who spends her days in front of a podium, Perino seemed in a rush to do her comedic bit and sit back down.

In addition to Perino, this year's panel of roasters included Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, Senator Orrin Hatch, and Representative Rahm Emanuel.

Before the four politicians had their chance to turn the tables on the late-night comedian, Scott Price, the president of the Spina Bifida Association, gave a brief introduction to the event.

Syndicated columnist and pundit Mark Shields, who served as master of ceremonies, sparked the fire of insults that would befall Colbert. "He became an icon by belittling our city in general and Congress in particular," Shields said, noting that Colbert was a narcissistic, loud-mouthed, creative genius.

Norton, who has appeared on the *Colbert Report* numerous times, had no trouble bashing the "one and only and one too many Stephen Colbert," while still finding time to remind the audience of her crusade for DC voting rights.

The popularity of news-show satires like the *Daily Show* and *Colbert Report* has blurred the line between mainstream media and off-color comedy with Colbert winning a Peabody Award earlier this year.

"But honestly, I don't have to stay up late to watch conservatives make fools of themselves," Hatch said. "That's my entire day!" The veteran senator from Utah, who writes music in his spare time (including the "Together Forever" tune dedicated to then-presidential-hopeful John McCain earlier this year), accused Colbert of horning in on his music gig.

"Songwriter? Hello? The little bastard's been ripping off my [material]," Hatch cried, leaving the audience both tickled and surprised that the Mormon conservative would use such language.

The final roaster and soon-to-be White House chief of staff Emanuel spoke of his reluctance to appear on the *Colbert Report*.

"The real reason is simple: I'm scared of Stephen Colbert," he confessed. "We're all scared of Stephen Colbert; we're scared of Stephen Colbert the same way Sarah Palin is afraid of a geography bee."

Despite the politicians' best efforts, the caliber of comedy rose significantly once Colbert finally took to the podium—roasted, but unscathed.

He politely told Norton that as in Congress, what she'd said was duly noted but had no influence. "Don't you dream of having a more important role? Like high school president?"



Colbert also speculated as to the real reason behind Emanuel's missing middle finger, which he half-severed during a meat-slicing accident as a teenager.

"I think the real story is that Rahm Emanuel has given it to so many people that it was worn down," he said.

As for some of the big-names on the Hill who have evaded his show thus far, Colbert offered them some motivation:

"Bring the receipt of your huge donation (to the Spina Bifida Association), and I'll show you my questions beforehand."

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