

Which Colbert was that again?

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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I enjoyed Charles McGrath's [profile of Stephen Colbert](#) in the *New York Times* magazine. McGrath's framework is that there used to be two Colberts, the man himself and the blowhard-pundit character. Now there's a third: a real live political actor, based on the TV character but moving beyond straightforward fiction and parody into some nebulous new territory.

I think that's all about right. But I don't know why McGrath writes off Colbert's 2010 congressional testimony as part of the old paradigm:

In 2008, the old [Colbert briefly ran for president](#), entering the Democratic primary in his native state of South Carolina. (He hadn't really switched parties, but the filing fee for the Republican primary was too expensive.) In 2010, invited by Representative Zoe Lofgren, he [testified before Congress](#) about the problem of illegal-immigrant farmworkers and remarked that "the obvious answer is for all of us to stop eating fruits and vegetables."

But those forays into public life were spoofs, more or less.

The quote McGrath chooses is a nice throwaway one-liner but an odd way to sum up Colbert's testimony, in which he eventually made it pretty clear that his concern was for the farmworkers--not "the problem" of their existence, and certainly not just cracking jokes. Maybe McGrath didn't watch [the same tape I did?](#)