

Bill aims to get tough on authorities

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Efforts to bring greater oversight and reform to the state's vast array of public authorities have stalled in the State Capitol as Gov. George Pataki, the Assembly and Senate have all pushed differing plans.

But yesterday four top state Democrats — Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, Comptroller Alan Hevesi and Assemb. Richard Brodsky — sought to resolve the impasse. They called on all sides to support a bill they say would end the agencies' wasteful practices.

The authorities — 733 throughout the state — have come under scrutiny over the past year after a number of scandals, and critics say they operate as a "shadow government" unfettered by state law.

Hevesi cited the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's renovation of its Manhattan headquarters, initially projected to cost \$145 million but now estimated at \$845 million.

Hevesi said many authorities are mismanaged and "some of them are corrupt, primarily because no one is watching."

He and the other three Democrats said they had taken ideas from the Republican governor

as well as Senate Republicans in crafting their plan.

A bill sponsored by Silver, of Manhattan, and Brodsky, a Westchester Democrat who is chairman of the Assembly's Corporations, Authorities and Commissions Committee, would appoint an inspector general to oversee authorities, slow their borrowing and impose tougher surveillance of their finances.

Much of the state's debt is accrued by public authorities. New York State has \$47 billion in debt, but the authorities owe an additional \$74 billion. By comparison, the state's budget is \$103 billion this year.

Kevin Quinn, a Pataki spokes-

man, said the governor was pleased the plan included proposals the governor advanced when he created a Commission on Public Authority Reform.

But Silver called for quick action. "We don't need any more studies," he said in reference to the commission. "Government needs fixing today."

In the Senate, state Sen. Vincent Leibell (R-Patterson), chairman of the Senate's Corporations, Authorities and Commissions Committee, said he had begun discussions with Brodsky and Silver about merging Assembly and Senate packages. "We will finish legislation this year," Leibell said.