

As gov, I'd put MTA on track, vows Spitzer

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ATTORNEY GENERAL Eliot Spitzer vowed to overhaul the MTA if elected governor, calling it a poorly run agency with labor-relations problems far deeper than the ongoing contract clash with workers.

Spitzer cited the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's "failed management structure" and said the way it deals with workers has to be reevaluated and changed.

"There is responsibility on both sides" to resolve the ongoing labor dispute, Spitzer said.

"But it is the responsibility of those in leadership positions to manage that relationship so that we do not have 23% of the workforce facing disciplinary proceedings," he said.

That "truly astonishing figure indicates that the problems there go much deeper than just this contract dispute," he said.

A Democrat and the leading candidate for governor, Spitzer made his comments during a speech at a Regional Plan Association forum in Manhattan, and later to reporters.

Spitzer said he was not taking sides in the feud. His office prosecuted Transport Workers Union Local 100 for conducting an illegal three-day strike. A Brooklyn judge imposed severe financial penalties, including a \$2.5 million fine on the union and jailed its president.

MTA officials declined to comment. But Gene Russianoff of the Straphanger's Campaign agreed with Spitzer. "He's right — their labor relations stink," Russianoff said. "Part of it is historical. There has been a long history of tense relations . . . and this round of negotiations the message from the top MTA brass to the union was 'Drop dead.'"

Spitzer also vowed a shakeup at the MTA, the Port Authority and other transportation agencies by picking executives and board members "based on professional excellence and experience, and not patronage."

"What we need, and what the public deserves, is getting the best, most dedicated people who understand transportation, finance and efficiencies to run those agencies," Spitzer said. "Right now, we don't have that."

The attorney general also said that his top funding priorities in the area of new expansion projects would be the first Second Ave. subway segment, the Long Island Rail Road link to Grand Central and a new Tappan Zee Bridge.

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