

## **It's About Time by Dan Jacoby**

Eliot Spitzer is running for Governor.

The election is still two years away, of course, but this is the time when we find out who is making a serious run. New York Attorney General Spitzer had promised to let everyone know by the end of this year whether he's running, and he kept that promise.

In just six years as the state's chief prosecutor, General Spitzer has made headlines again and again for going after – and catching – criminals of all kinds, from small drug dealers to large corporations. In an era when politicians seem to equate success and reelection with explaining why they need more time to accomplish what they failed to accomplish before, Eliot Spitzer just gets the job done.

Furthermore, New York has the most corrupt, despicable system of state government in the country. That does not necessarily mean the people in charge are corrupt (although who wants to lay odds?), but that the system itself is corrupt. Under this system, the Governor and the majority leaders of the state Senate and state Assembly have among them virtually unlimited power. Consider these facts:

- The Governor can, with one signature, abolish debate on any bill he wants passed quickly.
- Any state representative in either house can check in, leave, and then be automatically credited as voting "yes" on all bills that day – without actually being present.
- Whether a bill is even voted on is determined by the majority leader and nobody else. If the majority leader doesn't like you, your bill won't ever see the light of day.
- In each house, the majority leader controls the staff for every committee. Run afoul of the majority leader and your committee won't be able to get any work done.

This seemingly incredible set of rules is at least partially responsible for the fact that New York hasn't had a budget passed on time in 20 years. Time is wasted every year on extra legislative sessions. What's worse, local governments can't pass their budgets until the state budget is finalized, because they never know how much money to count on from Albany.

The Brennan Center of Justice at New York University has proposed a series of reforms that are generating a lot of buzz. Unfortunately, nobody seems willing to go on the record as supporting them. Except Eliot Spitzer. Only a strong governor who puts this issue front and center will fix the problem. George Pataki has already had 10 years, and he has ignored the issue.

Too much time has been wasted. It's time for a change.