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Gov't & Politics

Spitzer vows to get tougher on insurance fraud

By GLENN BLAIN
THE JOURNAL NEWS

(Original publication: October 2, 2002)

HARRISON — Attorney General Eliot Spitzer promised yesterday that cracking down on Medicaid and auto insurance fraud will be a top priority of his administration if he is re-elected to a second term in November.

Spitzer, a Democrat, said his office can do a better job of prosecuting bogus insurance claims and must stop the rampant fleecing of the state's Medicaid system. Such cases, he added, cost taxpayers and consumers billions of dollars each year.

"These are areas where public money is being wasted," Spitzer said during a meeting with The Journal News' editorial board.

Spitzer, who obtained national prominence earlier this year by launching investigations of Wall Street brokerages is being challenged by Republican Dora Irizarry, a former state judge.

Recent polls, including a Marist survey released yesterday, have shown Spitzer with double-digit leads over the Republican.

"Eliot Spitzer had four years to do something about auto insurance fraud," said Jake Menges, a spokesman for Irizarry. "Until a month ago, he did nothing."

Menges promised that Irizarry would make prosecuting fraud cases a priority.

During his 40-minute meeting at the newspaper, Spitzer said his greatest achievement is improving the quality of the attorney general's staff. The staff, he said, made possible all of the high-profile successes, including the financial industry settlements that forced brokerages to increase the

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independence of their Wall Street analysts.

"These cases require good lawyers," Spitzer said.

Spitzer said he was also proud of his office's work coordinating the efforts of Sept. 11 charities.

That coordination, he said, made it easier for families to receive funds and reduced duplication of efforts among the charities.

Despite speculation that he would eventually seek higher office, possibly governor in 2006, Spitzer said he is concentrating on this election and has made no other political plans.

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