

ELIOT PLAYS NEW CARD IN LICENSE WAR

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Body

AMID THE FUROR OVER his plan to give illegal immigrants driver's licenses, Gov. Spitzer yesterday tried to dampen the uproar, arguing the privilege of obtaining one was no higher than buying a MetroCard.

"I don't think it is a privilege any more than buying a MetroCard is a privilege," Spitzer said on **New** York 1 News of his three-tiered license plan. "When we walk down into the subway system to buy a MetroCard, no one says, 'Prove you are a citizen'; no one says, 'Where did you grow up?' "

But Republican rivals threatened yesterday to erect roadblocks to stop Spitzer's program, and even advocates for illegal immigrants called the governor a traitor for tailoring his proposal to appease federal officials.

Spitzer initially proposed one driver's license for all **New** Yorkers, regardless of immigration status.

But after meeting in Washington Saturday with U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, he revealed the **new** three-tiered plan.

Under the plan, the traditional license will be available to everyone, including illegal immigrants. The two other types will be available only to citizens and legal immigrants - and all require proof of identity.

Assembly Minority Leader James Tedisco vowed to slap the governor with a lawsuit this week to upend the **new** policy. "He's breaking the law, and his technology for scrutinizing immigrant documents doesn't work," Tedisco (R-Schenectady) said.

Other opponents said the governor's plan is doomed because he's provoked so much animosity on all sides.

"There is more opposition now across the board than there was before he flipped," said John McArdle, spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno (R-Rensselaer).

Advocates for illegal immigrants protested outside the governor's home on Third Ave. yesterday, denouncing Spitzer for abandoning his original plan.

"This is a **new** segregation in **New** York," said City Councilman John Liu (D-Queens), who said illegal immigrants will be offered a license that's akin to a scarlet letter.

Miguel Ramirez of the Cuzcatlan Hispanic Center said the **new** three-tiered plan has produced only skepticism. "They obviously want to gather more information on our community so they can do more raids," Ramirez said.

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Even support from the governor's allies like state Sen. Bill Perkins (D-Harlem) was waffling.

"It's a very awkward place," Perkins said. "I'm disappointed because now you have the advocates for the immigrants saying they feel betrayed by what he has done."

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Graphic

Inkyeung Choi, with other angry immigrants, demonstrates outside Gov. Spitzer's Manhattan home yesterday against license plan. Photo by Robert Sabo/Daily News

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