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DiNapoli to propose budget reform: In speech at Rockefeller Institute, comptroller will call for restricting debt, reducing authorities' powers
By James M. Odatto, Capitol bureau

ALBANY — Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli today will call for restricting debt, reducing the financial powers of public authorities and making state budgets easier to read.

In a speech this morning at the Rockefeller Institute, the Democrat, appointed this year as the state's top auditor, intends to call for staggered board terms of four years on all public authorities while curtailing authority borrowing.

The speech, "Every Dollar Counts: A Budget Reform Proposal for New York," arrives as budget planners expect next year's financial plan will come with a \$4.3 billion budget gap.

DiNapoli offers a recipe for changing the way public authorities use funds that might help.

He will call for authority spending not related to core missions to be turned over to state agencies and returned to the state budget so the spending is subject to oversight.

His message, coming less than two months before the 2008-2009 budget presentation by Gov.

Eliot Spitzer, will focus on producing a budget document that average people can read and comprehend.

"Right now the budget is written by bureaucrats for bureaucrats," DiNapoli states in highlights released by his office.

He promises, starting this spring, to publish a first-ever expenditure report for people to use to follow how much the state spent on travel, fuel for state vehicles, heating state buildings and more.

He also plans to identify all new state contracts on his office's Web site.

His debt reform pitch calls for a "hard" cap on new borrowing and for any additional debt to be part of a comprehensive plan to address infrastructure needs.

"Right now we have an artificial debt cap," the comptroller's notes state. "There is \$52 billion that doesn't even count under this cap. We need a hard cap that is linked to the state's ability to pay."

DiNapoli has noted several risks to the state's financial plan, particularly a heavy reliance on borrowing and nonrecurring revenues to pay for recurring expenses.