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Assemblymen: Nix MTA payroll tax

Miller, Molinaro, Ball push for audit

*By Jenny Lee-Adrian
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Three state assembly members are calling on Gov. David Paterson to eliminate the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's payroll tax and authorize a forensic audit of the agency.

Assembly members Joel Miller, R-Poughkeepsie, Marc Molinaro, R-Red Hook and Greg Ball, R-Carmel, sent a letter to the governor Thursday urging him to authorize an audit and make sure the MTA reevaluates its salaries and spending.

The payroll tax will cost Dutchess County businesses, nonprofits, school districts and governments about \$17.5 million a year, according to a Poughkeepsie Journal analysis of data from the state Department of Labor.

The tax charges 34 cents for every \$100 of payroll in the 12-county MTA region.

"The MTA is an agency that has not inspired a great deal of public trust or confidence and the only way we can restore that trust is with greater accountability and transparency," the letter said.

Report cited

The letter points to a report issued by the Empire Center for New York State Policy that shows 8,214, or more than 10 percent, MTA employees earned more than \$100,000 in a year.

Molinaro said the state approved the payroll tax entirely backward.

Tax dollars were spent first, taxes were increased and an independent audit has not been done yet, he said.

"We all agree we need an effective and efficient transit system, but it is a primary example of why New Yorkers are fed up with Albany's leadership," Molinaro said. "This is a horrible abandonment of basic responsibility to the taxpayers. We've been held financially hostage."

Molinaro said he hasn't heard a response from the governor yet since the letter was sent recently. But he said, he hasn't been contacted by the governor since he and other lawmakers sent a letter in May.
