

Hot 97 'Smackfest' State Investigation

Written by Keith ID1055

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The New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer announced Thursday that his office, along with the New York State Athletic Commission, has begun an investigation into hip-hop rap station Hot 97's sponsorship of the "Smackfest" competition, where two participants take turns slapping each other in the face to settle a dispute. The regular feature on Hot 97 was heard over the air and shown on its Web site.

"There is a state law designed to protect people from potentially dangerous and demeaning competitions," said Brad Maione, a spokesman for Spitzer's office.

The inquiry was initiated after Spitzer received a letter signed by six City Council members complaining about the popular contest that has since been stopped. Investigators will examine whether the station staged the boxing-like event without the proper licensing or permits, officials said.

"This is pure political opportunism," said Jeff Smulyan, head of Emmis Communications, Hot 97's owner. He called the attorney general's move hypocritical in light of shows that have drawn public criticism on other networks and radio stations.

"The Smackfest promotion has already been shut down, and we do not believe it violated the law in any way," he said. Political consultant Basil Smikle questioned why Spitzer, a Democratic gubernatorial candidate, would enter the fray.

"The issues of what is being played over the airways needs to be addressed by the community," Smikle said. "It shouldn't be a show but a real honest dialogue about how we change the direction of where this thing [hip hop] is going." Hip hop activist Charles Fisher said that while "Smackfest definitely was a huge mistake, I personally know the people at Emmis Communications and believe they will do all they can to rectify this matter."

The popular radio station, revered in the hip-hop community, has been the site of several well-publicized rap-related shootings. Earlier this year, two employees were fired and a third suspended without pay for a song parody and remarks considered offensive to the Asian community following the tsunami disaster. The station apologized and promised a \$1 million

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donation to relief efforts.

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