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Joe Lhota Makes His Mayoral Run Explicit

By Chris Smith



Afterwards, Joe Lhota claimed there was nothing new, that he'd just said the same thing he's been saying for the past two weeks: "I would not have left the MTA if I wasn't going to run for mayor." Yet Lhota is smart enough, and has been in the political game long enough, to know that the context in which he spoke those words today makes them matter more.

Lhota was the featured guest at a lunch meeting of the New York Building Congress, in a hotel ballroom overlooking Columbus Circle. The speech was Lhota's first since quitting as MTA chairman, but it had been booked beforehand, and he stuck to the same basic idea: what the city can learn from the response to Hurricane Sandy. The storm, and Lhota's leadership in getting the subways up and running again quickly, sparked the notion of his mayoral candidacy as a Republican, so his comments today were in many ways a test run for his campaign themes. Lhota quoted that old political strategist Shakespeare ("The past is prologue"), and said he could do for the city at large what he'd done for the MTA — not simply guide it through a crisis, but manage it efficiently. His final line: "Imagine what I can do in the future with a much more complex organization."

The crowd of roughly 500 real-estate and construction executives are people Lhota very much needs behind him for campaign money and business community support, and it applauded warmly. Lhota will make his run official soon, filing the necessary papers to become a declared candidate, and he seemed like he couldn't wait: On the way out, surrounded by reporters, he struggled to contain his natural gregariousness, repeating the same sentence — "I would not have left the MTA ..." — over and over with a sly smile.