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TO THE RESCUE

Victims' kin to get wartime tax relief

By JENNIFER BARRETT

The families of the thousands killed in the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center are getting a tax break.

New legislation makes families of the victims eligible for significant breaks usually reserved for casualties of wars overseas.

The Internal Revenue Service also announced several relief measures, including months-long extensions for affected corporations and individuals paying taxes that — for some — would have been due last week.

"The concerns were voiced to us, and we responded," said IRS spokesman Bruce Friedland.

Tax experts said the measures taken by the IRS are staggering in scope.

"Basically, if you either live or work or own a business in New York, or you're a relief worker, or you have records there, or you're the spouse of someone who died [in the attacks] — all of those people get relief," said Jackie Perlman, a tax-research associate at H&R Block's corporate headquarters.

"That, I think, is pretty wild. But when you think of how business was disrupted and records were destroyed, it's fitting," he said.

The IRS has posted specific information about the changes, and how they affect businesses and individual taxpayers, on its Web site at www.irs.gov.

Congress also responded swiftly to the tragedy, taking broad and unprecedented measures to provide relief to victims.

A bill passed unanimously by the House of Representatives late last week would forgive all 2001 income taxes owed for victims who died in the terrorist attacks and would cut their estate taxes in half.

Federal disaster benefits would also be tax-free, as would payments from airlines to families of passengers killed in the crashes of the hijacked planes.

The House also unanimously passed a bill to speed up delivery of benefits to the families of public-safety officers killed as a result of the terrorist attack.

The House bills await Senate approval.

But the Senate did unanimously pass a bill providing $40 billion in emergency spending, more than half of which was earmarked for disaster relief from the damage caused by the crashes of hijacked airplanes into the World Trade Center towers, the Pentagon and a field in rural Pennsylvania.

"The government has always tried, when there's a disaster, to provide some relief — disaster and tax relief," said Jim Magner, vice president for John Hancock's estate- and business-planning group.

But a disaster of this type and scale is unprecedented — as evidenced by a provision in the bill that states that the tax breaks "shall not apply to an individual whom the secretary determines was a perpetrator of any such terrorist attack."



'CLEAN' SWEEP: Coast Guard Petty Officer Tom Telehaney checks the air quality at 2 World Financial Center to see if it's safe for workers to return to pick up their belongings. Reuters

Remember: This war's about our way of life



THE last time I stood on the Brooklyn Bridge, I watched thousands of people die as the mighty south tower came tumbling down.

Yesterday morning, as I say a rosary on the same spot, the only visible remnant of the World Trade Center is a ghostly column of smoke. Where were they, exactly? I'm already forgetting, and this shames me.

Grim-faced and silent, a line of workers marches down Nassau Street into the Financial District. Everything smells burnt. I fall in step with them.

We get our first sight of the smoking stump of the south tower when we cross Fulton Street. In the near distance is the charred remains of the WTC's Borders.

The sight of a torched bookstore stops me cold. *This is what this war is about.* Islamic terrorists blow up Buddhist statues, and they burn down bookstores, the glory of our free civilization.

Remember this, New York. Remember this.

Just inside the door of Cafe Doppio sits a woman with a haggard, tear-swollen face, wearing a sandwich board bearing the photo of Terence McShane, missing from *Ladder Co. 101 in Red* Hook, Brooklyn.

"The whole company's missing. They found the truck," says Susan Ryan, the woman with the sign.

Standing next to her is her brother, Peter. The Ryans are related to firefighter McShane, and *they're keeping a vigil on* behalf of the family.

On the back of her sign is the Christmas card Terry and Cathy McShane sent out last year. "Peace on Earth 2000," says the card, which includes a photo of three happy little McShane boys.

Aidan, Colin and Sean *may be* orphans now.

Remember this.

Further down Nassau, you can hear a mournful "Star-Spangled Banner" wafting over the stunned crowd. Someone in the Federal Reserve Bank on Maiden Lane has put speakers in a window.

Over on Beekman Street, Tony Smith is sitting on a folding chair outside his business, the Yummy Krust Bakery and Cafe. The door is locked, and everything inside is coated with a fine layer of dust.

"No business till Wednesday, my friend. I can't get supplies," Smith says. So why is he here today?

"I had to be here to reassure my customers to stay strong. We *lost some customers*, and four of our neighbors at the Fire Department," he says, pointing down the street to Engine Co. 6, one of the first units on the scene.

At the Beekman Pub, a favorite hangout for the City Hall crowd, and a refuge for the lost during Tuesday's apocalypse, owner Jim Robinson scrambles to find a ladder so he can hang Old Glory *out front.*

He comes back inside with a smile on his face. "It's flying proud right now!"

Remember this, too.

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