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THE VISIT

Bush Tries to Reassure Children and Executives

By ELISABETH BUMILLER

President Bush sought to reassure schoolchildren and corporate executives yesterday on his second visit to New York since the World Trade Center attacks, then bought five pizzas for a lunch with firefighters and grieving relatives of the missing at Engine Company 55 in Chinatown.

"He told me I had beautiful children and to hang in there," said Robin Freund, whose husband, Lt. Peter Freund, was lost in the collapse of the World Trade Center. "And whatever he could do to help me, let him know."

Mr. Bush told schoolchildren in Chinatown and executives on Wall Street something similar. At a private round-table talk with some 30 business leaders, the president announced that his administration would ask Congress to authorize an additional $60 billion to $75 billion to boost consumer confidence, enhance business investment and help displaced workers. Congress has already approved $40 billion in emergency spending for disaster relief and a $15 billion bailout for the airline industry.

"I think there's no question we all agree that the events of Sept. 11 shocked our economy, just like it shocked the conscience of our nation," Mr. Bush said after the round-table discussion at Federal Hall in Lower Manhattan, the site of George Washington's inauguration.

Mr. Bush said that he told the executives — among them Kenneth Chenault of American Express, Sanford I. Weill of Citigroup and Betsy D. Holden of Kraft Foods — that the federal government has a "strong, active" role to play in bolstering the economy.

Mr. Bush's five-hour visit to New York was intended to portray the president as comforter of the grieving and a steward of the nation's finances. Officials said it was important that Mr. Bush chose to make his announcement about a $75 billion stimulus package in New York City, the heartbeat of the nation's economy but a city that he has shown little love for in the past.

That relationship has strikingly changed as the president has spent hours with the families of people killed in the trade center attacks, and has also provided billions of dollars in aid. Yesterday's visit coincided with statements by city and state leaders that they would ask the federal government for $40 billion more in assistance to cover the damage from the attacks on the twin towers — twice the amount already approved.

Not surprisingly, Karl Rove, one of the president's top advisers, was seen at the corner of Broome and Mott Streets in Chinatown deep in conversation with Brad Race, the chief of staff to Gov. George E. Pataki, and Charles A. Gargano, chairman of the Empire State Development Corporation. None of the three would say what New York was asking of Washington, but Mr. Rove offered this: "Did you ever see Carl Sagan, the astronomer, talking about the numbers of stars — billions and billions and billions?"

Afterward Mr. Race said that he and Mr. Gargano were asking for money to cover the cleanup in Lower Manhattan as well as for reconstruction at the trade center site. He would not put a dollar amount on the requests. "It's too much of a work in progress," he said.

Mr. Bush arrived in New York at Kennedy International Airport under heavy security. He took the presidential helicopter, Marine One, to the Downtown Manhattan Heliport, where he was met by Mr. Pataki and Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani. The president then traveled in an enormous motorcade — 22 motorcycles and 37 cars — to Federal Hall, which sits across Wall Street from the New York Stock Exchange.

Mr. Bush met privately with the business executives and listened to what he later described as a long list of their ideas for improving the economy. Among them, Mr. Bush said, were using some sort of tax cut to put money into the pockets of consumers, giving businesses tax breaks to invest in new equipment and helping unemployed workers.

Among the executives at the horseshoe-shaped table were Douglas N.

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Larry Downing/Reuters

Firefighters greeted President Bush yesterday and had lunch with him after he stepped off the presidential helicopter in downtown Manhattan.

Daft, the chief executive of the Coca-Cola Company; Gerald M. Levin, the chief executive of AOL Time Warner Inc.; Maurice R. Greenberg, the chief executive of the American International Group, one of the largest commercial insurers in the world; and Dean O'Hare, the chief executive of the Chubb Corporation, another big insurer. Mr. O'Hare said there was "just a resounding commonality of view in the room by the C.E.O.'s great job and that we're going to win this war."

Standing on the sidelines was Michael R. Bloomberg, the Republican nominee for mayor of New York City and the chief executive of the communications company that bears his name. Mr. Bush, in a not unexpected gesture to a Republican mayoral candidate, met privately with Mr. Bloomberg for 10 minutes before the discussion began. Bill Cunningham, egist, said that Mr. Bloomberg told Mr. Bush that "he expects to be a full partner with the president in rebuilding New York."

Afterward, Mr. Bush went to Public School 130 in Chinatown, a school that was closed after the attacks and has since reopened. In Debra Nelson's first-grade class, the president told the students to appreciate their teachers. "You know why?" Mr. Bush said. "Because they love you what took place at the World Trade Center, they can help you."

From there Mr. Bush went to Engine Company 55. Along the way, a White House staff member used funds from the president's personal White House account to pay for pizzas, $11 each, at Sal's on Broome Street. Mr. Bush shared them with Engine Company 55, which still has five firefighters missing after the terrorist attacks.

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