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There's no blank check for Pataki

Prez puts limits on aid

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Although the feds have stepped up with $20 billion to help the city's recovery from the Sept. 11 terror attacks, the White House is lukewarm on Gov. Pataki's request for an additional $34 billion in statewide relief.

White House deputy spokeswoman Claire Buchan reiterated yesterday that "the President has made a commitment to New York," but suggested that any projects that are not connected to the devastation caused by the Sept. 11 terror attacks aren't a priority.

"The priority is to help New Yorkers recover from the tragedy," Buchan told the Daily News.

The Pataki administration, however, is taking the long view of the prospects for the overall $54 billion package it proposed.

"We're going to continue working down in Washington," said Pataki spokesman Michael McKeon. "We know it's not going to be easy, but we're gong to keep pushing."

McKeon noted that the White House had made it clear to Pataki that it viewed the $20 billion commitment as "a floor, not a ceiling" for assistance to New York.

Mass transit

Pataki's proposal sought funding for projects such as the Second Ave. subway, commuter railroad projects, highway and bridge work, and a high-speed rail link between New York and Schenectady.

Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) agrees that Pataki's plan is an "important starting point," and she will work with the governor throughout the appropriations process, a spokeswoman said.

However, "our first priority is to allocate the $20 billion that meets New York's immediate needs. . . . We expect that commitment to be fulfilled," Clinton spokeswoman Karen Dunn said.

So far, $2.5 billion in federal funds has actually been released, according to the White House Office of Management and Budget.

It includes $2 billion for the emergency response and the cleanup at Ground Zero, and $500 million in aid to small businesses and people thrown out of work by the terrorist attack.

An additional $6.3 billion is in the pipeline for New York under the terms of an emergency spending bill passed by Congress Sept. 14, including money for debris removal, subway and road repair, building repairs, small business disaster loans and dislocated worker relief.

Making strides

Overall, the Office of Management and Budget calculates that $13 billion has come or is coming to the city from the national Treasury in Sept. 11 relief. The OMB also estimates a potential for at least $7 billion more in future funding.

McKeon rejected the suggestion that the size and statewide range of the $54 billion proposal has proved a political handicap.

He noted that the $20 billion commitment by the feds was a considerable stride toward the $34 billion Pataki had requested for basic rescue, recovery and and rebuilding costs.

The remaining $20 billion Pataki asked for recovery and revitalization was in step with Bush administration hopes to stimulate the U.S. economy via federal spending, McKeon said.

"Historically, what has been good for New York State's economy has been good for the national economy," he said.

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