NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

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N.Y.C. to-do list for Dubya

President Bush's weekend trip to New York marks the fourth time he has been here since the World Trade Center atrocity. It is appropriate and wise that the commander-in-chief return to the site of Ground Zero as frequently as possible, for such visits boost the spirits of our still-stricken city. However, there are other important things he should be doing to help.

First and foremost is to ensure speedy delivery of federal aid: the $20 billion that Bush promised to New York — a "down payment," he said — for rebuilding. Unfortunately, Budget Director Mitch Daniels has signaled that some of the money from the emergency appropriations bill will be used for general homeland security instead. Mitch Daniels and the American Red Cross: separated at birth?

Daniels says the feds will produce the full amount — and more — eventually. But retooling the aid package creates uncertainty about when the money will arrive. The city does not need uncertainty.

Other ways Washington can provide assistance:

■ Share law enforcement info. Federal agencies must keep NYPD brass briefed on terrorism. Mayor Giuliani backs a legislative remedy, which makes sense. But in a city that's been targeted by terrorists, the feds should already be voluntarily keeping the cops up to date — not waiting for orders from Congress.

■ Restrict airport landing rights. Before landing, international carriers flying into JFK and Newark should have to transmit passenger lists to facilitate background checks. Airlines that refuse should be barred. This, too, must be written into law, but, meanwhile, the feds can require advance manifests at least at New York airports.

■ Curb terror-related lawsuits. The city and local agencies were not negligent and should carry no legal liability for the Sept. 11 attack. Congress must indemnify New York by capping damage recovery at the amount of insurance held by a plaintiff before that date.

■ Create Medicaid funding-formula equity. The city pays $3.6 billion annually for its 25% share of the Medicaid tab. Together, the city and state pay 50%, with federal aid covering the rest. Most states get a better deal. New York should, too.

■ Convene Congress here. This page has proposed a special joint session in the city. Led by Rep. Charles Rangel, the entire state delegation has signed on, as have more than 100 other members. Such a session would dramatically display American solidarity with New York.

■ Give back Governors Island. Honor former President Bill Clinton's 1996 pledge to hand over the ex-military base for $1. Plans to sell it for $300 million must be scrapped. One mile from Ground Zero, the island could figure in the city's reconstruction plan.

On his first visit here, Bush made a promise: "We will rebuild New York City." He must keep his word.

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