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Bloomberg, Pataki Announce Brief Israel Trip

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Gov. George Pataki and Mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg announced yesterday in Manhattan that they will make a brief trip to Israel to show "solidarity" in the wake of recent terrorist bombings there that left 25 people dead.

"Once again terrorists have struck, and just as people around the world came to New York and expressed their outrage and their sympathy with us, I think it is appropriate that we go and do exactly the same thing in Israel," Bloomberg said during a news conference at his midtown headquarters.

Although details of the group's itinerary were still being finalized, they were expected to meet with high-ranking Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Speaking at a separate Manhattan news conference, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani said that he was also "considering going to Israel" with Bloomberg. Bloomberg's aides said later that Giuliani would make the trip.

Daily News Publisher Mortimer Zuckerman, a prominent local supporter of Israel, also was expected to make the trip.

The group is scheduled to leave on Bloomberg's private jet on Saturday and return late Sunday. The use of Bloomberg's private plane has raised ethical concerns about whether the mayor-elect will be allowed to ferry Pataki, and possibly Giuliani. The trip could bump up against city conflict of interest laws, which bar elected officials from accepting gifts worth $50 or more from companies doing business with the city. Bloomberg's firm, Bloomberg LP, leases a handful of computers to city agencies, and he has extensive ties to philanthropies and companies that work with the city.

The Conflict of Interest Board says "any gift may pose an appearance of impropriety, and the acceptance of a gift, no matter how innocently, may send the wrong signals to the gift-giver."

The law would not yet apply to Bloomberg, who takes office Jan. 1, but could apply to Pataki and Giuliani. Joe Conway, a spokesman for Pataki, said the governor has "reached out to the ethics commission for guidance and will follow whatever recommendation they make."

Pataki said it was "our obligation to stand with the people of Israel in their moment of need."

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