NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

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George Pataki, War Profiteer?

U.S. Sen. Larry Craig, an Idaho Republican with a lot to say about how Washington spends your money, dropped by this week. So, naturally, we wondered out loud as to how much money he had brought with him.

"Pardon me?" he said, right eyebrow arched.

You know — for New York. How many of the megabillions Gov. Pataki asked for, post-9/11, is New York really going to get?

"Oh. Ha ha," he laughed. Mirthlessly.

"There's a general feeling in Washington," Craig said, "that needs identified before Sept. 11 ought not be paid for out of emergency money.



BOB MCMANUS

"Sept. 11 shouldn't be [seen as] an excuse to make a run at the Treasury," said Craig.

Those were the words. And the eyebrow arched again, making it clear that hell will freeze over before Washington provides the rest of the country with reason to believe that New York will turn a profit on 9/11.

Deep down, Gotham is the city America truly loves to hate. Washington, especially.

And not wholly without reason. Here's one more:

On Tuesday, Gov. Pataki took his paper cup back to D.C., seeking $1.7 billion in "temporary" — i.e, "emergency" — Medicaid funding.

The governor's rationale is that Sept. 11 will lead directly to a heavier caseload for the program — and so the feds owe it to New York to cover the costs, blah, blah, blah.

Or, as one droll recent commentary put it, "New York is merely seeking its fair share."

Really? Medicaid is the joint federal-state program that covers health care for the poor. And some states get more federal Medicaid dollars than others. New York, for example, enrolled about 7 percent of the nation's Medicaid caseload before 9/11, but got more than *17* percent of the program's federal funds. In fact, New York spent more federal Medicaid money than California and Texas *combined*.



Pataki: "Emergency" re-elect drive.

In absolute dollars, the numbers produce vertigo; the notion that New York doesn't get its fair share of Medicaid is simply demented.

And 9/11 changed none of the basic arithmetic.

This is not to suggest that the state doesn't have a problem. It does, and now.

But it's not *that* New York provides too little health care for the poor. It's that, in New York, Medicaid is more about public employment than it is about health care for the poor.

Fact is, New York seeks to support more hospitals than it needs, or can hope to afford. They rely on Medicaid and related programs to stay afloat, but there aren't nearly enough Medicaid patients in New York to do the trick. Or *any* kind of patients, for that matter.

So hospitals, many teetering on bankruptcy, are reduced to poaching each other's patients — which explains the increasingly frantic radio and TV ads aimed at the potentially ill.

One hospital specializing in cancer treatment now says, on air, that patients who come there *first* live *longer* — the implication being that all the *other* hospitals'll kill ya. Maybe deliberately.

Unseemly? Sure is.

It's long past time to cull the hospital herd — but good luck to the politician brave enough to suggest it.

Pataki, of course, isn't brave at all in this regard. It's an election year, and he needs to keep Dennis Rivera, head of the politically significant health-care workers' union, happy.

So don't be surprised if Albany itself tries a Medicaid bailout, maybe as early as next week. The poor won't be any better off, but Pataki and Rivera will be smiling.

As for Washington, New York's Medicaid imbalance is (to use Sen. Craig's formulation) a "need identified before Sept. 11 [that] ought not be paid for out of emergency money."

It won't be. Bet on it.

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