

Push for Stimulus Package: Including Help for NY Kids

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New York, NY — With the Obama administration pushing for Congress to pass federal economic stimulus legislation as soon as possible, some experts say it should include spending for children's programs. The House plan includes more than \$9 billion for such programs in New York, according to the group First Focus.

Karen Schimke, president and CEO of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, favors the House approach. She says with nearly 600,000 more jobs lost nationwide in January, Congress needs to act now.

"Of course, serving young children is a stimulus. First, you meet their needs. Second, you are paying the salaries of low-income individuals who are going to spend it — that's what a stimulus package is."

The U.S. Senate will vote on its version of the stimulus legislation soon. Bruce Lesley, president of First Focus, says that sets the stage for a battle over competing versions of the bill. He says with New York and the nation bleeding jobs, there is not time for a long debate.

"You can sit around and tinker with the bill, maybe make it slightly better here or there, but what's really important is the speed and quickness in getting this money out into the economy. Every day people are losing jobs, so every day wasted is not a good thing."

Lesley says the House bill includes funding for Head Start and special education grants. He says it's too early to tell where the Senate funding for children's programs will be, except that it will be much lower.

Critics of the stimulus package argue the spending will just increase the deficit and will not produce jobs.

President Barack Obama will hold a town hall meeting in Indiana today in an effort to rally support behind the federal stimulus plan.