

Lame duck's golden eggs

By James M. Odatto Capitol Bureau

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ALBANY -- Even as he urged lawmakers to help him cut spending, Gov. David Paterson last week quietly authorized \$16.7 million in grants from a fund he controls -- to pay for chess tournaments in New York City, foreign trade offices in Chile and Australia, and to promote a New Jersey Super Bowl in four years with the [National Football League](#).

In an act one policy analyst called "outrageous," Paterson's budget director on Nov. 30 signed 20 grants from the governor's member item account.

The discretionary awards -- from the community projects fund -- are for new contracts, mostly to New York City organizations. And in many cases, the money will not go to a New York state community.

The grants are well above traditional amounts some of the recipients usually receive from the state -- such as the \$500,000 for Chess-in-the-[Schools](#) Inc. for schools in New York City. It helps pay for chess competitions and supplies as well as programs to encourage college enrollment.

Other awards are going out of state -- such as \$5 million to [New Meadowlands Stadium Co.](#) in New Jersey for the [NY/NJ Super Bowl XLVIII Host Committee](#) Inc.

The money was approved the day after Paterson demanded the Legislature return to pare spending and assist in reducing a \$315 million budget gap so this year's shortfall won't roll into next year's \$9 billion deficit. The governor said he wants the Legislature to work with him to make cuts "to clear my conscience" that he had done whatever he could to spare the next administration a bigger budget mess.

"I just think that it is a sad commentary," Paterson said about the Legislature's inaction on his budget balancing plan, adding that the cuts are necessary to avoid insolvency.

Meanwhile, Paterson's budget director, [Robert Megna](#), was ready to add to the state's commitments. Megna signed off on Paterson's discretionary spending Tuesday, including \$5 million to help the NFL host the 2014 Super Bowl by developing a strategy to market the region and attract and retain business.

Spokespersons for the governor and Megna would not comment. A publicist for the NY/NJ Super Bowl host committee said the state appears to be the first to commit funds, although New York City and New Jersey are supposed to kick in some to the host committee for other projects.

E.J. McMahon, a fiscal policy analyst with the [Manhattan Institute](#), said he was beyond surprised after the [Times Union](#) told him about the list of projects, particularly the collaboration with the NFL. Paterson's unannounced grants, he said, are "outrageous."

"He calls the Legislature back for a special session and castigates them for not cutting the budget and he's spending five million so the world can learn more about the New York City region?" McMahon said. "That takes the cake. This isn't Jacksonville, Fla. -- it isn't like the world doesn't know about the New York City area." He said the proposed spending comes as other public services and amenities are being trimmed -- for instance, the reduced hours of the [New York State Museum](#).

Paterson has earmarked funds for two other museums. He plans a \$500,000 member item for the Jewish Children's [Museum in Brooklyn](#) for galleries and exhibits. Another \$500,000 would go to the [Parrish Art Museum](#) in Southampton for exhibitions, lectures, films, concerts and classes. That sum is extraordinarily generous, said director [Terrie Sultan](#), who said the museum typically gets a much smaller award from the state Council on the Arts but not from the governor.

Other grants on the list include \$6 million sought by Paterson's former director of services, [Valerie Grey](#), in her new job as chief operating officer for the [Education Department](#). The grant would augment money for the [Smart Scholars Early College High School](#) Program to help students graduate from high school. Grey did not return a call seeking details.

In her new job, Grey also requested and received approval for a \$250,000 grant from Paterson to pay for "gubernatorial archives record retention."

Another \$252,000 is set for the [Council of Great Lakes Governors](#), on whose board Paterson serves. [David Naftzger](#), who is paid \$113,470 in base salary by the nonprofit, Chicago-based council, said the money will help New York and seven other states afford foreign trade offices in Brazil, Chile, South Africa and Australia.

Paterson is directing \$861,500 to a London-based entity called the [International Business Development Group Ltd.](#) to promote exports by New York businesses and investment in New York from abroad. The money will also help pay for a European office.

A Manhattan-based group called Health Corps. is scheduled to receive \$150,000 from the governor's fund. It will help pay for health instruction in four New York City high schools, bolstering better eating initiatives promoted by Paterson's wife, [Michele Paige Paterson](#). The organization has received much smaller sums from lawmakers' grants in the past. "Apparently he wanted to send a few checks before he leaves office," said [Elizabeth Lynam](#) of the [Citizens' Budget Commission](#).

Such granting during a fiscal crisis doesn't make sense, said [Blair Horner](#), legislative director for the [New York Public Interest Research Group](#). "The governor should show restraint," he said. "He's talking about laying people off. I don't know how you defend that."

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Achilles Track Club: \$250,000

Addicts Rehabilitation Foundation Center: \$250,000

Asian [American Coalition for Children](#) and Families: \$150,000

Austra Management: \$472,000

Brotherhood/Sister Sol: \$250,000

Chess-in-the-Schools Inc.: \$500,000

Committee for [Hispanic Children](#) and Families Inc.: \$250,000

Council of Great Lakes Governors: \$252,000

Education Department for Allocation to [School Districts](#) under a competitive grant program: \$6,000,000

Harlem [School for the Arts](#): \$250,000

Health Corps: \$150,000

International Business Development Group: \$861,500

Jewish Children's Museum: \$500,000

Miles for [Matt Foundation](#): \$30,000

NY/NJ Super Bowl XLVII Host Committee: \$5,000,000

Parrish Art Museum: \$500,000

Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History: \$250,000

State Education Department: \$250,000

The Beacon Institute: \$410,800

The Trevor Project: \$150,000

Total: \$16,726,300

Source: Division of the Budget