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The Bush administration plans to host a series of economic town meetings around the country in coming months to assess how businesses are coping in the wake of the terrorist attacks, according to Commerce Secretary Don Evans. Evans said that he and other members of Bush's economic team would schedule round-table discussions in various cities and report back to the president on what more needs to be done to deal with the disruptions caused by the Sept. 11 attacks and the slumping economy.

He said that those invited to participate will include small business owners, workers, economists and chief executive officers of major U.S. companies.

"It will be a chance to listen and to learn," Evans said in speech to be delivered to the National Association of Manufacturers.

Various members of the administration's economic team, including Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, Office of Management and Budget Director Mitchell Daniels, Lawrence Lindsey, head of the president's National Economic Council, and Glenn Hubbard, chairman of the president's Council of Economic Advisers, will participate in the meetings.

The aim will be to assess how the government's various efforts to deal with the terrorist attacks and stimulate the economy are working and determine what more needs to be done.

The Principal Financial Group, noticing a steady rise in interest by individual and group clients for its life and disability products, issued an unusual response: slow down.

The Principal, its financial representatives and insurance marketers are encouraging consumers to not purchase life and disability insurance out of anxiety in response to recent events.

The Principal suggests those individuals and employers seeking to supplement their financial planning portfolio meet with their financial advisor and assess their total situation.

"Having a solid financial plan in place is important at any time," said the company. "Including life and disability insurance in your portfolio is a prudent way to protect the futures of your family and employees, however these products should be part of a more comprehensive financial plan. For this reason, we encourage clients interested in adding insurance policies to their portfolio to speak to a trusted advisor, such as a financial representative or accountant. The goals people should be seeking are financial security and peace of mind. The tools for achieving these goals include life and disability income insurance. However, to be truly successful, a financial plan is needed."

The Justice Department is seeking public comment on a government program that will provide money to the relatives of those who died or were injured in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The victims' compensation program, established by Congress in September, is to begin Dec. 21 and will dispense money — the amounts have not been determined — to cover lost wages and victims' pain and suffering.

The amount of the awards will depend on "the harm to the claimant, the facts of the claim, and the individual circumstances of the claimant," the department said.

The Justice Department is in charge of setting up rules for the program and is seeking comment on many complex issues that must be ironed out.

Among the issues: how people should apply for compensation, whether the program should pay for victims' lawyers and whether people who are not satisfied with their payment can appeal.

One of the most contentious issues is whether government compensation should be reduced by the amount victims' families receive from pensions, insurance payments or gifts from charities.

The law creating the program says awards should take into account the amount of "collateral source compensation" applicants have or will receive but does not specify what sources should be included in determining reductions in awards, department officials said.

The program was set up to serve as an alternative to filing lawsuits against the airlines and other entities. Those who receive awards will forfeit their right to sue.

A special master, similar to a judge, will be appointed by Attorney General John Ashcroft to oversee the program.

Payments are to be awarded within 120 days.

The Department's Office for Victims of Crime can be found at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/vfa. The email address for comments on victims' fund is victimcomp.comments@usdoj.gov.