

LI wins \$101.6 million in state jobs aid

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ALBANY -- Long Island was awarded \$101.6 million Thursday in state aid to help jump-start job creation.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said the funds would go toward 66 building projects, education initiatives and business expansions in Nassau and Suffolk counties. The grant money and state tax credits would provide momentum for key developments such as the Wyandanch Rising blight transformation project, Brentwood's Heartland minicity and the Ronkonkoma LIRR-MacArthur Airport transit

hub.

The aid comes as Long Island struggles with a weak economy and job losses even as employment grows elsewhere in New York. The state funds seek to create good-paying positions in technology to replace the tens of thousands of jobs lost at defense contractors in the 1990s.

All of New York's 10 regions got some aid Thursday. But the big winners, besides the Island, were Buffalo, Syracuse and the North Country, which encompasses the Adirondack Mountains. New York City, which was one of six runners-up, received \$66.2 million for 50 projects.

A five-member panel, appointed by Cuomo, judged the job-creation plans written by regional economic development councils, also appointed by Cuomo. The plans lay out economic goals for the next five years and will be used to evaluate whether projects receive Albany's backing.

Cuomo said he established the competition in July because "growth is going to come from a regional development strategy, there is no single New York State economy."

Nearly \$800 million in awards were announced Thursday from the \$1 billion set aside for the purpose. The final \$200 million will be distributed before March 31, according to Kenneth Adams, Cuomo's economic development czar.

Long Island and the other three big regional winners, as part of their total awards, each received \$25 million in grants and \$15 million in state tax credits that have yet to be designated for specific projects. A spokesman for Adams said the projects singled out for help Thursday would not share in this aid.

Regional runners-up did not receive this undesignated money.

Cuomo, a Democrat, and legislative leaders have committed to including funds in the 2012-13 state budget for another competition. The amount has yet to be determined, according to their respective spokesmen.

"The councils were a great way to bring communities together, to build the economy," said state Sen. Dean Skelos (R-Rockville Centre), the majority leader. "We will continue funding."

Skelos joined Cuomo and other state leaders for a one-hour ceremony in a packed theater near the Capitol. CNBC anchor Maria Bartiromo, a Brooklyn native, introduced the speakers and winners. Former NBC anchor Garrick Utley, who most recently led a SUNY think tank, narrated one of two films that were shown.

Cuomo presented engraved plaques to the leaders of each regional economic development council. Kevin Law, president of the Long Island Association business group, and Stuart Rabinowitz, Hofstra University president, led the local 22-member council.

Later, asked about the Long Island plan, one judge said he was impressed by ongoing collaborations between researchers and business owners to commercialize inventions.

"The council thought deeply about how to revitalize communities that are struggling, how to capitalize on mass transit to encourage development," said Bruce Katz, metropolitan policy director at the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank. "This was a suburban renewal plan."

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