

Federal \$300 stimulus checks start coming in this month

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Local taxpayers will begin receiving \$300 stimulus checks this month as part of the \$1.2 billion in American Recovery Reinvestment Act funds the Puerto Rico government is giving directly to local residents. José Ortiz, the head of Gov. Fortuño's interagency committee on the federal stimulus plan, said Wednesday.

"We had the option of giving out the money through a [\$7 a week] reduction in payroll taxes, but people really wouldn't notice that. With this stimulus [check] people will be able to use the money to buy things," said Ortiz, who also is executive director of the Aqueeduct and Sewer Authority.

"It should be in the last week of August [that people begin to receive checks] and public employees will be the first ones to start receiving checks," Ortiz said, after discussing opportunities under the \$6 billion in ARRA funds Puerto Rico will receive through the summer of 2011 with the University of Puerto Rico's Business Administration Alumni Association.

The \$300 checks will continue rolling out to local taxpayers — or 85 percent of the island's workforce — through October.

Under the direct stimulus plan, taxpayers will receive a \$100 check this Christmas and a \$400 check in July 2010 — for a total of \$800 in direct stimulus to each taxpayer

under President Barack Obama's stimulus plan, Ortiz said. "If we did not have this, things would be much harder for the economy of Puerto Rico," said Ortiz, who outlined that local businesses should take advantage of opportunities available to them through \$6 billion in ARRA funds the island will receive through the summer of 2011.

Half of the \$6 billion allotted to the island were up for grabs by all U.S. jurisdictions, but Puerto Rico successfully beat many of them out by focusing on rapidly submitting proposals for the funding, Ortiz said.

"There are another \$300 million that are in competition that we may receive," he said. "We formed a team to help entities [municipalities and local non-profit organizations] that we knew could qualify but that would not know how to request the funds."

Due to this teamwork, 41 island municipalities received a total of \$37 million — or 40 percent of the funds available under this specific program — to develop renewable energy projects in the towns.

Some 5,500 lower-middle-class families will also qualify for \$48.9 million in credits to buy solar heaters and efficient air conditioners and refrigerators to reduce their electricity expenses under ARRA's weatherization program, Ortiz said.

"The only bad proposal is the one that is not requested. That is the worst thing you can do," Ortiz said, adding that the influx of ARRA funds to Puerto Rico should begin to crest in December and remain steady throughout 2010.



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José Ortiz, head of Fortuño's interagency committee overseeing the disbursement of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Among the ARRA allotments the island has received are \$70 million to improve 250 schools by the end of this year, \$800 million for the government's Health Reform, \$164.4 million to renovate housing projects, \$20.8 million for water projects in rural areas, \$17 million for health centers, \$49 million for clean water projects and \$19 million for drinking water projects and \$105 million in road improvements.