We should not let the prospect of filling hotel rooms and restaurants overshadow the real benefit of hosting the Republican National Convention one year from now. The true value of the convention is that it will allow the city's leaders to forge a direct relationship with the leaders of the federal government. The benefits of building such a bond over the next year could help this city for years to come, not just during the four days in August and September when the Republican Party comes to town.

Planning a presidential convention, like making arrangements for a wedding, is an intense process. By working with New Yorkers between now and August 2004, Republicans will surely absorb the rhythms and flavors of this city. Republican members of Congress may even begin to understand why eight million people think this is the only place on earth to live.

And if true love is too much to ask for, New York can still justify the relationship on practical grounds. With Albany in fiscal free fall, New York City needs help from Washington more than ever. Help can come in lots of ways: waivers from federal regulations, funds for cultural landmarks, flexibility in spending federal recovery money, and new equipment for police, fire and emergency workers. The federal government's designation of the convention as a "national special security event" is a good sign that it will help defray the city's $22 million in expected security costs.

Certainly the convention has provided an impetus to accelerate the rebuilding of lower Manhattan. We should also encourage our Republican visitors to ride the subway -- it stops at Penn Station, after all -- so they can better understand the vital role of mass transit as they consider the reauthorization of the federal transportation bill. And when they attend concerts or visit museums, we should emphasize to them the importance of financing the National Endowment for the Arts.

Before you can get help, however, you need a friend, or at least an ally -- which is what we've got now that the Republicans have tied their future to ours. It's a change from 1975, when the city faced a fiscal crisis and the federal government's initial denial of loan guarantees to the city was immortalized in a Daily News headline, "Ford to City: Drop Dead." Our city was widely regarded then as in America but not of America. This is no longer the case.

Even though almost 3 percent of the nation's population and approximately 10 percent of the nation's office space are in...
New York City, the city does not have the clout it deserves in the nation's capital. Both of our senators work hard to help our city, but they are in the minority party. Key federal spending decisions are made by the House and Senate appropriations committees, which are headed by Republicans from Florida and Alaska respectively. The legislators most critical to New York City are not from New York.

Admittedly, the New York Democrats are a noisy bunch, but they do not control a single committee in the Congress. Without cooperation from the Republicans, our Congressional delegation simply cannot deliver what the city most needs from the federal government. Fortunately, we have a Republican mayor and governor who can compensate for the lack of power that the Democrats wield in Washington these days. For New Yorkers, the Republican National Convention is a chance to work with, rather than against, the party that controls the White House and Congress.

This is a city that welcomes new people, no matter where they come from. This week Republicans from places like Alabama and Iowa were in town for a national committee meeting, and even with the shootings at City Hall, most seemed to think of New York as a place where they can feel at home. Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg deserves credit for persuading the Republicans to come to New York. It's our job to make sure the Republicans believe in our city as much as we do.

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GRAPHIC: Drawings (Seymour Chwast)

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