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Cheney presses House to hold back N.Y. aid

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WASHINGTON — Vice President Cheney did some big-time arm twisting on Capitol Hill yesterday to head off a move that would ensure delivery of all $20 billion in promised rebuilding funds to New York City this year.

Cheney, who has remained largely out of sight since the Sept. 11 terror attacks, lobbied Rep. Jim Walsh (R-Syracuse) of the House Appropriations Committee to abandon plans to sponsor an amendment to add $11 billion to the $40 billion already appropriated to cope with the disaster.

The $40 billion in emergency spending was passed Sept. 14 and initially was intended to include the $20 billion that President Bush promised for New York.

But the White House has since attempted to siphon some of that for the military and homeland security, giving New York just under $10 billion and saying the rest would come later out of "discretionary" cash.

But discretionary cash usually requires offsetting cuts that members of Congress from other states might fight.

Cheney apparently was seeking to persuade Walsh to abandon his amendment in exchange for a promise that the money would be provided next year.

Democrats lashed out at Cheney's pressure coming the day after New York City was hit by a second airplane tragedy.

"It's really sad that the day after that plane crashes is the first day we see the vice president coming up here — to lobby against the money for New York," said David Sirota, spokesman for Rep. David Obey (D-Wis.), the top Democrat on the Appropriations Committee. "He is up here to clamp down on the New York money."

"It would seem to me that having Cheney and the administration come up to persuade New York Republicans that they should not join New York Democrats in asking for more help for New York is contrary to the initial statements," said Rep. Jose Serrano (D-Bronx).

"There are great needs around the country, but New York took a tremendous hit on Sept. 11," said Rep. Nita Lowey (D-Westchester).

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