NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

NEWSDAY, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2001

Bush Offers $2B More Aid

Friction between Democrats, GOP

By Ellen Yan
WASHINGTON BUREAU

Washington — The White House has offered to release $2 billion more this year for New York's terrorism recovery, driving a wedge in the once-united local congressional delegation between Democrats desperate to get the president's full $20 billion funding pledge and Republicans willing to take what they can.


Rep. James T. Walsh

The New York Republicans' threat to commit political sin by holding up defense and emergency spending in a time of war forced President George W. Bush to back down. He offered to give $8.3 billion instead of $6.3 billion in the latest installment from the $40 billion emergency funding approved for the nation.

They had hoped to get $16 billion released from the emergency spending pot, but the White House foiled the attempt Wednesday.

"We went and got the hard part, the money that was not certain to flow to New York," said Rep. James Walsh (R-Syracuse), who helped lead the money fight and called the $2 billion a "remarkable amount."

"This agreement puts us within, if not the letter, then the spirit of the law," he said.

Settling for the extra $2 billion would bring the state's total to $11.5 billion this year. Of the additional funds, $1.85 billion would come in economic development grants and $209 million in a workers package: workers compensation, job training, and safety education and health testing for rescuers at the smoldering Ground Zero.

Republican negotiations late Thursday with Bush budget officials produced no more funding for unemployment and extended health benefits. But it was agreed that the president would put in writing his commitment for this funding in the economic stimulus bill, contentious legislation with a questionable fate this year. The head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency would send a letter also, reaffirming reimbursements of rescue costs it must pay anyway.

But Democrats vowed not to abandon the fight for the full $20 billion this year. Fuming privately, they were told of the latest offer Friday in a delegation meeting, after the Republicans met to discuss details. Some also accused Republicans of double counting to make the latest offer look better and complained of "robbing Peter to pay Paul," referring to the transfer of money from other emergency accounts approved in September to New York.

"They are trying to make New York look like a pauper with a tin cup begging for money," said Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-Jamaica Estates). In the delegation meeting, Rep. Charles Rangel (D-Manhattan) tried to glue together the division, urging the others not to blame the president, accuse Republicans of caving, nor to attack Democrats for being partisan.


Reps. Charles Rangel (D-Manhattan), left, and Gary Ackerman (D-Jamaica Estates)

But Friday, from Gov. George Pataki on down, most state Republicans flipped to the administration's long-held position — New York can't spend the full $20 billion this year but will get the dollars when it needs them. "Right now, we don't need $10 billion," said outgoing New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, contradicting what his successor Michael Bloomberg declared after visiting the delegation here Thursday. "The reality is the White House has granted every request that we've made for actual money that we need."

Emily Tjelmeland contributed to this story.

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