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N.Y. GOPer joins fight for city aid

$9B at stake in House

By TIMOTHY J. BURGER
DAILY NEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — A key upstate Republican challenged his party leaders yesterday to allow the House to vote on an amendment that would force the White House to give New York an additional $9 billion in emergency aid this year.

Rep. John Sweeney (R-Saratoga Springs) backed an amendment offered by Rep. Nita Lowey (D-Westchester) but opposed by House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.).

Hastert wants to block it from the House floor for fear it could pass — and test Bush's promise to veto any Sept. 11 aid beyond the $40 billion already approved.

The dispute over funds for New York City has become a bitter bipartisan battle.

Democrats say Bush promised $20 billion in aid to the city, but has provided only $11 billion. They are unwilling to accept the administration's promise to allocate the rest next year, fearing legislative fights could derail the funds.

The debate over the money has spread beyond the New York delegation and involved the leadership of both parties as well as City Hall and the governor.

Bush cold shoulder

The latest person to enter the fray was Rep. Dave Obey (D-Wis.), top Democrat on the Appropriations Committee. Obey said Bush refused to even discuss an allocation that included the disputed New York money as well as funds to cover "four classified problems ... where we think this country is very, very vulnerable to terrorist attacks that could kill a hell of a lot of people."

Obey said disgustedly that Bush's response at the Nov. 6 White House meeting was "'Thank you for coming.' ... It was not a meeting. We were potted palms."

White House spokesman Scott McClellan replied, "It is very clear to the American people that the President and the administration are doing everything we can to combat terrorism and prevent future attacks."

The intense politics of the issue has roiled New York officials.

Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) is now publicly out front in the fight for the $20 billion after his office initially backed a behind-the-scenes approach.

Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) appeared to hammer her old rival Mayor Giuliani for backing Bush and saying New York won't need more money until June or later.

"Anyone who says we don't have those needs hasn't looked at what we've been studying," Clinton said. "We can't wait to get our full $20 billion until next summer."

Rep. Charles Rangel (D-Manhattan) said bluntly, "The problem that we have is no one wants to tell President Bush that he broke his word to New York City. Therefore, we haven't heard from Mayor Giuliani. We haven't heard from Gov. Pataki."

In New York, Pataki called it "very unfortunate for people to try and score political points instead of trying to pull together to work in the interest of New York."

With Melissa Grace and Joe Williams

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