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NY Closer to Getting $20B in Emergency Aid

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WASHINGTON BUREAU

Washington – New York won one round yesterday in its battle to win the full $20 billion this year to cope with the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, when the Senate Appropriations Committee approved $7.5 billion in emergency funding. But tougher battles lie ahead.

Democratic New York Sens. Charles Schumer and Hillary Rodham Clinton said it will be an uphill fight to get the full Senate to approve the additional money. Several hurdles stand in the way, not the least of which is President George W. Bush — who despite earlier assurances to provide New York $20 billion — is now opposed to giving out all of the money this year.

"We have made a good, good step forward," Schumer said in a meeting with reporters. But, he said, from here on out, "it's going to be a real tough fight."

Also yesterday, the Senate approved and sent to Bush for his signature a transportation spending bill which includes money for the Long Island Rail Road East Side Access project and the Second Avenue Subway, getting a combined $16.7 million; $5 million for the Cross Harbor Freight Rail Tunnel Study; and $3 million for the Jamaica Station Intermodal project.

Schumer and Clinton said they were calling on New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Gov. George Pataki and New York Mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg to press their Republican colleagues to support granting New York the full $20 billion this year. But Giuliani and Pataki have been reticent to get into a fight with the Bush administration and GOP Senate leaders, saying they are sure New York will get the money when it is needed.

Last week, the House, acceding to Bush's threat to veto any spending that exceeds a total of $40 billion in homeland security and recovery efforts this year, approved a bill with nearly $12 billion for New York. Senate aides said they had recalculated that amount, however, and said it's only about $9.5 billion. New York members cried foul and vowed to win the additional spending in the Senate.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) won the amendment to add the additional $7.5 billion to New York's recovery money this year, bringing the total in the Senate's version to about $20 billion. Clinton acknowledged that getting the extra $7.5 billion "will be a tougher sell."

Schumer and Clinton were particularly proud yesterday of a portion of the spending designated for hospitals, ferries, transit security, small businesses and nonprofit corporations. The amounts are small — generally about $100 million each — but they said the allotment will address immediate needs and set up a process for more money to flow next year and beyond.

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