

## **\$10.9B Health Bill for 9/11 Workers is Nixed**

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By: Oren Yaniv

Congress Sunday shelved a \$10.9 billion bill to provide health care and compensation for Ground Zero workers, at least in part due to opposition from Mayor Bloomberg.

The House of Representatives failed to vote on the bill after City Hall objected to a provision that would have required the city to pay 10% of the cost of a long-term Sept. 11 health program.

The total cost would have been \$5.1 billion for a 10-year program that would have provided health care to those sick from working amid toxic World Trade Center debris. The city's share was to be \$500 million.

The bill also would have reopened the Sept. 11 Victim Compensation Fund, adding an estimated \$6 billion for those who became sick after working amid the debris.

John Feal, a 9/11 responder and founder of the FealGood Foundation, went to Washington in a failed push for the bill.

"The mayor pretty much squashed the bill on us," a disappointed Feal said last night. "We should do right by these people who are sick and dying."

Reps. Carolyn Maloney (D-Manhattan), Jerrold Nadler (D-Manhattan), Vito Fossella (R-S.I.) and Pete King (R-L.I.) said the New York delegation would reintroduce another bipartisan bill next year.

"We will work together to meet the sizable need to care for those who lived and worked in the immediate area around Ground Zero - not to mention those who helped in the immediate aftermath," the lawmakers said in a statement.

Supporters had hoped the House would vote on the package over the weekend, but time and support ran out amid intense congressional negotiations over the \$700 billion financial bailout package.

The Senate would likely not have had time to pass the bill anyway, but backers said House passage would have helped move the measure forward.

Bloomberg spokesman Jason Post said the Sept. 11 health bill was "a step backward" and said "it put an undue burden on city taxpayers." He noted the bill would raise fivefold the city's annual tab for 9/11 programs.

Other city officials said the feds should pay the full cost as a matter of principle because Sept. 11 was an attack on America.

Denis Hughes, president of the New York State AFL-CIO, countered that the bill was doomed by "shortsighted" thinking at City Hall.

"What really sunk this was the mayor's opposition," Hughes said. "I think they miscalculated."