

\$30 Million after 9/11 Health Bill Fails in the House

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By: Julie Shapiro

Federal 9/11 health funding took a small step forward this week after taking a giant leap backwards last weekend.

The small step forward was the federal government's first grant to treat Lower Manhattan residents, students and office workers. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention awarded \$30 million over three years to the city's W.T.C. Environmental Health Center on Tuesday.

"It's terrific," said Catherine McVay Hughes, chairperson of Community Board 1's W.T.C. Redevelopment Committee. "They deserve every single penny.... Hopefully people will sign up and take advantage of it."

Hughes said the federal funding is particularly significant in light of last weekend's news that the \$10.9 billion 9/11 Health and Compensation Act floundered in the U.S. House of Representatives, after Mayor Michael Bloomberg withdrew his support.

Bloomberg had advocated for previous versions of the act, which would have reopened the Victim Compensation Fund and dramatically increased the federal government's role in caring for first responders and especially residents, students and office workers who are sick.

But Bloomberg objected to the bill's provision that the city pay 10 percent of the long-term health costs without influencing how those funds are spent. The city would have owed \$500 million for the \$5.1 billion 10-year health program, according to press reports.

"The bottom line was this was not a bill, when it got done, that really gave the city the protection or the aid that we really needed," Bloomberg said, according to press reports.

Jason Post, spokesperson for the mayor, told reporters that the bill was "a step backwards" and would have required the city to quintuple its yearly contribution.

The bill was supposed to come to a vote last weekend, but the House was busy trying to hammer together a Wall St. bailout.

"This is bad news for the residents, office workers and first responders," said Hughes, from the community board. "It's unfortunate this had to come before Congress during the worst financial crisis this country has experienced in years. It's unfortunate that the federal government will not protect their own."

Hughes believes that the federal government should pay 100 percent of the 9/11 health costs, but she said the 90 percent the bill offered would have been better than nothing.

Rep. Carolyn Maloney, Rep. Jerrold Nadler and the bill's other sponsors pledged to keep fighting for 9/11 healthcare. The bill's provisions are supported by Senators Hillary Clinton and Chuck Schumer, but it is not expected to be introduced in the Senate until next year.