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News of the week

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Zadroga Bill Priorities: Unions, Activists Differ

Refine It or Pass, Then Amend
By ARI PAUL



MICHAEL J. PALLADINO: Get funding stream first.

Lower Manhattan community groups and first-responder unions clashed last week over a bill that would provide permanent Federal funding for 9/11 health monitoring and treatment, with labor supporting its swift passage and the residential groups calling for changes in the measure's language.

Flanked by residents holding signs in Chinese, Spanish and English at a demonstration next to Ground Zero Oct. 21, Kimberly Flynn, the coordinator of the 9/11 Environmental Action Group, said that while she and other community activists support the James Zadroga Act, it should be amended to more inclusive.

'Limits Civilians' Treatment'

A letter from her group and Beyond Ground Zero to Members of Congress states, "The limit of 15,000 future enrollees would guarantee treatment to only 5 percent of the most heavily exposed civilian population."

Ms. Flynn also took issue with the boundary for the fall-out area in lower Manhattan for residents and workers as being from Houston St. to all points south.

"The World Trade Center Environmental Health Center has published a study, they have documented evidence of the same kind of health problems in people who live and work between Houston and 14th St. as the people who live and work below Houston St.," she said. "Now the line is at Houston St."

Ms. Flynn echoed a concern the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association—the one key union opposing the measure as currently written—has voiced, saying that the bill should include specific language linking certain types of cancers to exposure to 9/11 toxins.

'A Pattern of Disease'

"There's clearly a new pattern of disease developing here that is the result of the exposure of these young cops to 9/11 toxins. That means that that condition needs to be on the list of covered conditions," she said.

In August, the WTC Monitoring and Treatment Program at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine found that a small number of law-enforcement responders who worked at Ground Zero had developed multiple myeloma, but not enough to prove that there is a link between their illnesses and exposure at the site.



The Chief-Leader/Michel Friang WANTS BROADER LANGUAGE: Kimberly Flynn (right), coordinator of the 9/11 Environmental Action Group, said that the James Zadroga Act, which would secure long-term Federal funding for 9/11 health monitoring and treatment, needs to be amended to cover more downtown Manhattan residents and workers who were exposed to 9/11 toxins. With her is Tammy Kim of the Urban Justice Center.

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Four of those people found with the cancer were under age 45, a statistical abnormality.

“Should multiple myeloma be on the list of covered conditions? Yes,” Ms. Flynn said. “We believe leukemia cannot be far behind.”

Unions representing other Police and Fire Department responders have argued that while the bill’s language is not perfect, it is more important to pass it and work out details later in order to secure the long-term funding streams as soon as possible.

‘Get Funding, Then Improve Bill’

Detectives Endowment Association Michael J. Palladino said recently, “In this difficult economic time, securing funding is paramount, and this bill accomplishes that. If the language falls short in certain areas, we can tweak that moving forward. For example, we have made improvements and amendments to the original World Trade Center Bill in Albany, but without the passage of the original bill, there would be nothing to build on.”

Several groups representing sick and injured rescue and recovery workers rallied by the WTC site Oct. 24 along with the bill’s key sponsors— U.S. Reps. Carolyn Maloney and Jerrold Nadler—to urge its passage.

“It’s absolutely essential to pass the bill in its present form, and once the bill is passed and implemented there will be opportunities to put in a monitoring component, to get more slots for community residents and to augment the funding for the bill,” said Paul Stein, who is the health and safety chairman of Division 199 of the Public Employees Federation. “But the main point now is we need to pass the bill.”

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