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# House Passes a \$9.7 Billion Storm Measure

NANDEZ JAN. 4, 2013



Sen. Charles Schumer and Kirsten E. Gillibrand of New York held a news conference Friday after the Senate gave final legislative approval to financing for flood insurance for Hurricane Sandy victims. Photo by Mike Sharrett for The New York Times

WASHINGTON — Under intense pressure from New York and New Jersey, Congress adopted legislation on Friday that would provide \$9.7



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billion to cover insurance claims filed by people whose homes were damaged or destroyed by [Hurricane Sandy](#).

The measure is the first, and least controversial, portion of a much larger aid package sought by the affected states to help homeowners and local governments recover costs associated with the storm. The House has pledged to take up the balance of the aid package on Jan. 15.

The House passed the insurance measure [354 to 67](#); it then cleared the Senate by unanimous consent. President Obama is expected to sign the measure into law.

In the House, all of the votes against the aid came from Republicans, who have objected that no cuts in other programs had been identified to pay for the measure despite the nation's long-term deficit problem. The 67 Republicans who voted against the measure included 17 freshman lawmakers, suggesting that the new class will provide support to the sizable group of anti-spending conservatives already in the House.

Speaker John A. Boehner, Republican of Ohio, brought the bill to the House floor after [he drew criticism](#) from Democrats and Republicans alike for adjourning the previous Congress earlier this week without taking up a \$60.4 billion aid bill that the Senate had passed to finance recovery efforts in the hurricane-battered states. Among those most critical of Mr. Boehner were several leading Republicans, including Representative Peter T. King of Long Island, who is a senior member of



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Congress, and [Gov. Chris Christie](#) of New Jersey, who is a possible presidential contender in 2016.

The bill adopted on Friday would give the National Flood Insurance Program the authority to borrow \$9.7 billion to fill claims stemming from damage caused by Hurricane Sandy and other disasters. The [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#), which administers the flood insurance program, recently notified Congress that it would run out of money within the next week to cover claims filed by individuals.

“The administration is pleased that Congress has taken action to ensure that FEMA continues to have the funds to cover flood insurance claims, including over 100,000 claims from Hurricane Sandy the agency has already received,” Clark Stevens, a White House spokesman, said in a statement. “We continue to urge Congress to take up and pass the full supplemental request submitted last year to ensure affected communities have the support they need for longer term recovery.”

Congress’s action did not fully mollify lawmakers from New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and other states struck by the storm. Some officials continued to criticize the chamber’s leadership for failing to act more quickly on the larger aid package, saying it provided the necessary financing to help the region rebuild.

“I am optimistic and worried,” said Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York. “Optimistic because there is pressure on the House to produce. Worried because I know how difficult it is to get things through the Congress.”

Mr. Christie and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of New York, a Democrat, issued a similarly cautious statement.

“Today’s action by the House was a necessary and critical first step towards delivering aid to the people of New Jersey and New York,” they said. “While we are pleased with this progress, today was just a down payment, and it is now time to go even further and pass the final and more complete, clean disaster aid bill.”

The overall measure would provide money to help homeowners and small-business owners rebuild; to repair

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bridges, tunnels and transportation systems; to reimburse local governments for overtime costs of police, fire and other emergency services; and to replenish shorelines. It also would finance an assortment of longer-term projects that would help the region prepare for future storms.

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Some Republicans have been critical of the size of the proposed aid package, and have suggested that it [includes unnecessary spending](#) on items that are not directly related to the hurricane, like \$150 million for fisheries in Alaska and \$2 million for museum roofs in Washington. Representative Frank A. LoBiondo, Republican of New Jersey, said Friday that the measure going before the House later this month would “strip out the extraneous spending directed to states not affected by the storm.”

“Today’s vote is a key step in getting critical federal assistance to the residents, businesses and communities devastated by Hurricane Sandy,” Mr. LoBiondo said in a statement. “I hope my colleagues recognize politics has no place when dealing with a disaster and that the overwhelming bipartisan support demonstrated today is present as the remaining federal aid is considered.”

In the House debate leading up to the vote on Friday, several lawmakers said it had taken too long for Congress to provide federal aid to the region and urged the speaker to make good on his pledge to bring the \$51 billion aid package to the floor later this month.

“We have been waiting for 11 weeks,” said Representative Carolyn B. Maloney, a Democrat from New York City. “It is long overdue.”

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A version of this article appears in print on January 5, 2013, on page A14 of the New York edition with the headline: Congress Approves \$9.7 Billion in Insurance Aid for Hurricane Victims.  
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