



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on December 22, 2010

Senate Unanimously Passes 9/11 Responders Bill

Moments ago, the United States Senate voted to pass the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act, named after a police detective who worked at Ground Zero and died from lung problems as a result. Up until this morning, the future of the bill was questionable as Republican Senator Tom Coburn of Oklahoma threatened to prevent the measure from reaching the floor. Once Coburn struck a deal with Senate Democrats that lowered the cost of the bill, however, the legislation was taken up by unanimous consent, without debate or a roll call vote.



The responders bill provides \$4.2 billion in compensation and long-term healthcare benefits for the first responders who became ill working at Ground Zero in the days following the September 11 attacks.

The House version of the bill, with a \$7.4 billion price tag, passed in September. In the Senate, however, opponents rejected the expensive cost. In order to acquire the necessary support, Senate Democrats made changes to the bill to reduce the cost. The *Washington Post* reports, "The original Senate version of the bill would have provided \$6.2 billion in benefits to responders."

That version of the bill failed by a vote of 57 to 42, without a single Republican vote in favor of the legislation.

The *Post* explains, "The deal reached by Coburn and Democratic leaders [today] would lower the price tag to \$4.2 billion, of which \$1.5 billion would go to health benefits and \$2.7 billion would go to compensation."

Final language in today's bill was being hammered out until a few minutes before the vote.

The agreement struck between Senate Democrats and Republicans was announced by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid.

Upon learning of the [bipartisan compromise](#), New York Democratic Senators Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand — the bill's Senate co-sponsors — held a press conference.

"The Christmas Miracle we've been looking for has arrived," they declared. "Over the last 24 hours, our Republican colleagues have negotiated in good-faith to forget a workable final package that will protect the health of the men and women who selflessly answered our nation's call in her hour of greatest need...We thank our Republican friends for coming together to fulfill America's moral obligation to the Heroes of 9/11."

Similarly, Republican Senator Scott Brown of Massachusetts said, "The first responders on September 11th unselfishly risked their lives when our nation needed them the most. Their heroic efforts should never be forgotten. I am pleased that we were able to come together and agree upon a workable solution that provides care to these brave Americans. After many months of working on this effort, I am proud to vote for this bill."



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Republican opposition to the bill, led by Senator Coburn, ranged from the extravagant cost, lack of necessity, and vulnerability to abuse, to the lack of time to debate the bill in the remaining days of the lame duck session. Some opponents wanted the bill to be financed through spending cuts, and others argued that the benefits in the bill may overlap with worker's compensation benefits.

The bill now makes its way to the House of Representatives for final passage.



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