

9/11 Victim Compensation Fund makes deep cuts to benefits

By Sandy English
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Last week, the second 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund (VCF), commissioned in 2011 by Congress primarily to address the needs of workers sickened after clearing the debris from the ruins of the World Trade Center that was destroyed in the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, has announced that it will cut payouts to current applicants in half and applicants after February 2 by 70 percent.

The VCF posted a statement on its website that it has received a surge of applications in 2018, particularly in the last four months. It noted that this was likely because of a Notice of Inquiry it published in October that stated, “funding that has been appropriated to compensate claimants may be insufficient to compensate all claims” but also pointed to “the increased rates of serious illnesses suffered by members of the 9/11 community, the increasing number of deaths that can be attributed to 9/11 exposure.”

The fund’s special master, Rupa Bhattacharyya, told the media, “Unfortunately, the law really leaves us no choice. This is the fairest way we could come up with to do it.”

The fund, which was started with a completely inadequate \$7.5 billion, has now depleted more than \$5 billion. By most estimates, 10,000 people in New York have been diagnosed with cancer as a result of the attack and its aftermath. Health conditions related to 9/11 have been certified for 43,000 people. Two-and-a-half-billion dollars in the fund remain for 19,000 people who have filed and for the thousands more who are expected to file before the fund closes next year.

The US government has direct culpability in the deaths and illnesses of construction workers who assisted in the clean-up of the site, area residents and

other victims of the contaminated environment in the aftermath of 9/11.

On September 14, 2001, Christine Todd Whitman, then the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), announced: “The good news continues to be that air samples we have taken have all been at levels that cause us no concern.” Whitman, the right-wing former Republican governor of New Jersey who was appointed to the EPA by George W. Bush, was ruled not liable for damages in civil court in 2008 for assuring residents of the area on September 18, 2001, that the “air is safe to breathe and their water is safe to drink.” In a 2003 internal investigation, the EPA found no basis for these statements.

Michael Barasch, an attorney who has represented over 11,000 9/11 illness victims, has observed that there has been “an unanticipated explosion of cancers and deaths in the 9/11 community. Many more are expected to get sick as a result of their exposure to Ground Zero toxins in the 8 months after 9/11. ... [T]he air was highly carcinogenic, with a chemical composition similar to Drano, mixed with pulverized glass and concrete.”

Barasch noted about the cutting of funds by the VCF: “The only thing these people did wrong was believe the EPA when they said the air is safe. They were lied to by our government. Then they were promised this compensation, and now the rug is being pulled out from underneath them.”

New York politicians who sponsored the 2011 bill, Democratic Representatives Jerrold Nadler and Carolyn Maloney and Republican Peter King, responded with a promise to introduce a “Never Forget the Heroes: Permanent Authorization of the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund Act” that would continue to fund victims.

Whether funding is restored or not, this gesture is more of the patriotic hoopla about heroes and sacrifice that has polluted the phony, and now discarded, war on terror since September 12, 2001.

The 9/11 attacks were the product of American foreign policy. The nearly 3,000 people killed outright and the tens of thousands sickened in the aftermath are its victims. The state that has ravaged the Middle East for decades gives them jingoistic cheers in great quantities but is not much interested in healing the terrible wounds it has caused.

The real priorities of America's ruling elite were on display the same day that the fund made its announcement as President Trump bragged in a press conference in the Rose Garden about the large amount of funding allocated to the Department of Homeland Security, which was created as a result of 9/11 attacks: "We have so much money, we don't know what to do with it. I don't know what to do with all the money they're giving us. It's crazy."

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