

## The Post-Standard

### **From Walsh to Maffei, millions for CNY**

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Washington -- Before he retired from Congress at the beginning of the year, former Rep. James Walsh left his successor, Rep. Dan Maffei, with a treasure map of sorts.

The "map" pointed to where Walsh had negotiated for millions of dollars in federal aid for Central New York in a series of congressional spending bills that were not acted on in 2008.

Walsh, a Republican, told Maffei, his former Democratic rival, where to find the money, and to make sure it was included in legislation that would be voted on this year.

On Wednesday, their collaborative effort paid off in a big way for Central New York. The House of Representatives passed a \$410 billion domestic spending bill for fiscal 2009 that combined nine annual appropriations bills left over from last year.

The legislation, which now moves to the Senate, includes more than a dozen local projects to be paid for with about \$10 million earmarked for the Syracuse area.

The bill includes money for many of the region's big educational institutions, as well as small neighborhood programs -- about \$475,000 to rehabilitate housing through the Syracuse Neighborhood Initiative and \$285,000 to turn Burnet Park's former ice rink on the city's West Side into an all-season recreation center.

"It's great for the community," Walsh said of the local projects approved Wednesday. "It will help in a difficult time. It will hopefully position our community to come out of this recession in a strong way."

Walsh said he was pleased the money for Central New York projects stayed in the appropriations bills, with Maffei's help.

"I think it's significant because my former colleagues kept them in," said Walsh, now a government affairs counselor at a Washington, D.C., law and lobbying firm. "Often, when a member of Congress retires, their earmarks are pulled out."

It also could be the last time Central New York sees a significant amount of money from congressional earmarks -- the pet projects inserted by lawmakers into spending bills -- which some view as pork-barrel spending.

President Barack Obama and many congressional Republicans have said they oppose earmarks, and none were included, at the president's request, in the \$787 billion stimulus package approved this month.

The nonpartisan group Taxpayers for Common Sense said it counted 8,570 earmarks at a cost of about \$7.7 billion in the omnibus bill approved Wednesday.

Maffei said he asked Democratic House leaders to hold off on their initial plan to remove spending requests from retired lawmakers, including Walsh.

"There were some thoughts in the Democratic leadership to zero out Congressman Walsh's and a lot of other earmarks of former members," Maffei said. "A number of us went to leadership and told them it makes no sense, and not to pull the rug out from under us."

Maffei said he spoke with House Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey, D-Wis., and others, and asked that Walsh's earmarks remain untouched.

"I wanted to make sure anything (Walsh) started in motion would stay there," Maffei said.

Among the big items approved Wednesday, according to Walsh:

- \$1.2 million for the Army Corps of Engineers to continue the cleanup of Onondaga Lake.
- \$904,000 for the Health Advancement Collaborative of Central New York to help develop a regional electronic medical records system. The nonprofit planning group, formed in 2005, represents local employers, doctors, hospitals and insurers.

The system will digitize patient and medical records at Syracuse's four hospitals and five large medical practices, including the Syracuse Community Health Center, said Nancy H. Smith, the collaborative's executive director. Smith said the group also wants to help local doctors convert patient records to a digital format.

- About \$713,000 to the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse for its alternative energy research that uses wood -- rather than corn or other food crops -- to make ethanol.

With the latest infusion of aid, the "woody biomass" project will have received about \$3 million from the federal government, said SUNY-ESF President Neil Murphy.

Murphy said one of the goals is to make the alternative fuel cheap enough to sell commercially.

- \$713,000 for the Syracuse Center of Excellence in Environmental and Energy Systems. The center focuses on developing clean and renewable energy, indoor environmental quality and water resources.
- \$713,000 for SUNY Upstate Medical University to improve its facilities and upgrade equipment.
- \$475,000 for the Metropolitan Development Association's Essential New York Initiative. Rob Simpson, the MDA's president and chief executive officer, said the money will allow the 5-year-old program to keep working to attract green technology businesses to the region, and to help spur

collaboration between local universities and industry.

- \$428,000 for LeMoyne College to buy new equipment and instrumentation for its science laboratories. The college is raising money for a \$26 million renovation and expansion of its science building.
- \$250,000 in additional federal aid for the Onondaga County interoperable communications system. The project will make it easier for emergency response personnel from different agencies to communicate on the same radio frequencies.

Central New York's two other congressmen also saw some earmarks approved Wednesday in the spending bill:

- In Madison County, Rep. John McHugh, R-Pierrepont Manor, secured \$500,000 for the village of Canastota to help stop sewage overflows into Canastota Creek.
- In Cayuga County, Rep. Michael Arcuri, D-Utica, secured \$475,750 for the Cayuga County Regional Digester Facility. The plant will process manure and other organic waste from local farms, producing methane to help reduce energy costs in three county office buildings.

Arcuri also secured \$196,514 for the Cayuga County Industrial Development Authority to build a soft-cheese production plant in the Aurelius Business Park. The plant would bring in Saratoga Cheese Corp. and create about 275 jobs statewide.

Saratoga Cheese said in October it planned to build a new \$40 million specialty cheese plant in Aurelius.

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