



Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) goes over his notes Thursday before a news conference at the U.S. Capitol. (Win McNamee/Getty Images)

## House passes spending bill that includes benefits for WNY

By [Jerry Zremski](#) | Published March 22, 2018 | Updated 1 hour ago

President Trump didn't get much of what he wanted in the \$1.3 trillion spending bill the House passed Thursday, but Western New York members of Congress got plenty of what they wanted.

The \$1.3 trillion bill, which funds the government through the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30, sets aside money for numerous programs that Trump wanted to eliminate but that local lawmakers fought to keep. The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Great Lakes funding and aid to cities all escaped Trump's proposed cuts.

Meantime, lawmakers increased funding to combat the opioid crisis and to rebuild the nation's infrastructure.

The generous funding of all those programs was no surprise, given that Congress struck a bipartisan budget deal earlier this year that drew the outlines for more spending. Thursday's must-pass spending bill followed up on that budget bill by filling in the blanks with millions of dollars.

Republicans, who pushed the bill to passage in the House by a 256-to-167 margin, lauded the legislation.

"Hardworking Americans can be assured that Congress is spending taxpayer dollars wisely to make sure our children can feel safe in their schools, our towns and cities have sound infrastructure, and we are closing gaps in security at our borders," said Rep. Chris Collins, a Republican from Clarence.

But many Democrats, including Rep. Brian Higgins, supported the measure as well – largely because it ignored many of Trump's budget cuts, which they thought would hurt the country.

"A lot of the things he wants are outrageous," said Higgins, a Buffalo Democrat.

The Senate is scheduled to consider the bill Friday.

Here's a line-by-line look at the spending plan as it might affect Western New York:

**LIHEAP:** The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance program faces what seems like an annual fight for survival, and it survived again in this spending bill. The program, which Trump wanted to eliminate, instead will see an annualized increase of 0.7 percent, to \$3.64 billion. That's hugely important to Western New York, given that 69,127 families in Erie County alone got aid through the program as of last December.

**Great Lakes funding:** The Obama-era Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which is responsible for the Buffalo River cleanup and the waterfront redevelopment stemming from that, would end if Trump got his way. But the spending bill instead keeps funding steady at \$300 million on an annualized basis.

**Opioid funding:** Trump has pushed for increasing federal efforts to fight the opioid crisis, and Congress responded with money: \$3.3 billion more than the government spent last year, including more than \$2.8 billion in increases for treatment, prevention and research for programs within the Department of Health and Human Services. Some of that money is bound to trickle down to Erie County, where 268 people died of overdoses last year. New York's two senators pushed for the funding increase, and Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer said: "New York deserves every federal resource possible to combat the growing scourge of opioid drug abuse and trafficking – and to increase treatment and prevention."

**The drug czar:** Western New York officials were outraged to hear that Trump wanted to move the Office of National Drug Control Policy –the drug czar – away from White House control and over to the Justice Department. Congress not only rejected that move; it increased funding for the White House office from \$388.2 million to \$415.5 million. Some of that money filters down to local agencies that fight drug abuse and drug dealing.

**Transportation funding:** Trump proposed eliminating the Obama-era Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery grant program, which funds innovating infrastructure projects. Instead, congressional negotiators tripled funding for the program to \$1.5 billion – which could mean big bucks for Buffalo. The city already relied on the program for returning cars to Main Street in downtown

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Buffalo, and Higgins said the funding increase would dramatically increase the chances that the city could get a so-called TIGER grant to fund the restoration of the DL&W Terminal at the foot of Main Street.

**Mass transit money:** The president asked Congress to slash the Federal Transit Administration's New Starts program from \$2.4 billion to a mere \$1 billion, but instead Congress boosted funding to \$2.64 billion. That increases the likelihood that Buffalo's Metro Rail system could someday get federal funding for an extension, because the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority would not be seeking the money from a cash-starved agency.

**Clean water infrastructure:** Trump wanted to keep the federal investment in local water systems steady at \$1.4 billion, but Congress increased that figure to \$1.7 billion. That means that aging local water systems have a better chance of getting federal grants to rebuild their infrastructure.

**Aid to cities:** The main federal program for localities – the Community Development Block Grant – survived yet another murder attempt in the budget bill, given that Trump wanted to eliminate it. Instead, lawmakers boost its annualized funding from \$3 billion to \$3.365 billion. The Buffalo metro area typically gets about \$21 million annually under that program with more than half of that money going to the city of Buffalo, and those totals should increase slightly under the new spending bill.

**Medical research investment:** The bill increases funding for the National Institutes of Health from \$33.3 billion to \$37 billion, much more than the \$500 million hike Trump proposed. The larger increase probably means that more federal money will trickle down to the Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center and other local institutions that rely on NIH funding to pay for some of their research.

**West Valley:** The West Valley Demonstration Project will get \$75 million to continue its clean-up work, \$8.6 million more than it had in fiscal 2017. New York's two U.S. senators fought for the increase. "These federal funds will help ensure that the site will be cleaned up as quickly and safely as possible, so that Western New Yorkers can live and work in the area without having to worry about this decades-old nuclear waste," said Sen. Kirsten E. Gillibrand, a New York Democrat.