

Even in a city of inflated egos, Rep. Charles Rangel's sense of personal entitlement is magnificent.

Rangel, D-N.Y., chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, put in for \$2 million of taxpayer money for a pet project -- a university complex named for himself. That's chutzpah.

He defended the earmark by saying he has been in Congress 36 years and having his name on the project will bring more private donations to the Charles B. Rangel Center for Public Service, the Rangel Conference Center and the Charles Rangel Library planned for the City College of New York.

**Rep. John Campbell, R-Calif., in his second year in Congress, has made a hobby of pushing Rangel's buttons. Dubbing Rangel's earmark his "monument to me," Campbell asked in a floor debate whether he himself could do what Rangel had done.**

**Rangel responded with this tangled thought: "I would have a problem if you did it, because I don't think that you've been around long enough that having your name on something to inspire a building like this in a school."**

Rangel's project survived the challenge because he's who he is and few in Congress really want to stop the train of self-aggrandizement. Who knows when it might be his turn to see his name engraved in granite? After all, there's no longer any obligation to die before a grateful nation memorializes its statesmen.

The American landscape is littered with "monuments to me." Nobody can top the legendary Sen. Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va. His name adorns more than three dozen sites -- education and technology centers, clinics, federal buildings and courthouses, a highway interchange, a bridge and even the locks and dam at Gallipolis Ferry, W.Va.

At the National Institutes of Health, nearly every imposing building honors NIH friends in Congresses gone by. There's the Mark O. Hatfield Clinical Research Center, the Claude Pepper Building, the Lowell P. Weicker Building, the Silvio O. Conte Building and the Louis Stokes Laboratory.

But not all the buildings look to the past. The C.W. Bill Young Center for Biodefense and Emerging Infectious Diseases was dedicated last year. It's named for Rep. C.W. Bill Young, R-Fla., former chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

Young, first elected in 1970, has been a staunch supporter of health issues in Congress over the decades. The Defense Department's marrow-donor program is named for him.

Still, there's something that sets teeth on edge about naming public works after the people who hold the purse strings. Some in Congress have tried to stop it.

Republicans objected in 2005 to renaming the Global Communications Center building at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta for Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, and the headquarters of the Emergency Operations Building at the CDC for Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa. Harkin and Specter ran an appropriations subcommittee.

The honor actually was the idea of Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, but it looked like a glory grab.

The hero for today is Georgia state Sen. Robert Brown, a Democrat, who earlier this year learned that folks back home in Macon wanted to name something for him. Brown proposed a bill prohibiting anyone from naming any public property for Robert Brown of Macon.

The bill that passed the Georgia Senate would create a State Memorials Registry. This is a kind of Do Not Honor list of people "who voluntarily request that no public building, site, structure, road, highway, street, intersection, interchange, bridge or other public property be named for them." That ought to cover it.

Before a jurisdiction could name any public property for anyone, it would have to get a certification from the state that the would-be honoree's name isn't on the registry.

Here's my guess: If someone were to create such a registry for Congress, Charles Rangel and

Robert Byrd wouldn't sign up -- and the registry just might be named for the person who proposed it.