

Congressional representatives generally find ways to avoid rules they don't like. If Newport Beach Rep. John Campbell is successful, his colleagues will soon be trying to dance around a new requirement that bills containing earmarks disclose who requested them and what the money is for.

Earmarks — commonly known in many cases as pork — are special projects representatives tuck into bills to benefit their district. Whether they benefit many constituents or a few special interests, they're rarely given the level of scrutiny that high-profile spending gets.

Sometime this month, Campbell expects a new House rule that he supports to be proposed that would require legislation to mention the earmarks and who requested them.

"When you request federal funds ... you ought to be proud about it or don't request it," Campbell said. "If you can stick money in a bill for something and no one can really ever find out that you put it in there, that leads to abuses."

He was asked to request money for 70 projects, and he only submitted seven of those requests, he said. Campbell's standard? The money has to go to a public agency, it has to have a federal connection and it must have public benefits.

Campbell said he thinks the majority of House members will support the rule change, but he admitted it has some drawbacks.

A House rule is a bit softer than a bill, and a majority of members can vote to override it. And while it may slash pork, the rule isn't expected to cut the federal budget.

"Reforming earmarks is not the way to reduce federal spending," Campbell said. "Total earmarks are less than 1% of federal spending."

Congress is also expected to decide this month on one of the earmarks Campbell did request — funding for restoration of the Upper Newport Bay. He asked for \$18 million, and it was trimmed to \$5 million in a water appropriations bill. The House and Senate must reconcile separate versions of the bill before the funding will be final.