

Hoping to head into the Memorial Day recess with a bang, House Republicans used a procedural motion on Thursday afternoon to try to block funding for a little-used airport named after Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.), who continues to be plagued by ethics troubles.

But 28 Republicans sided with 235 Democrats in voting to table the measure. By contrast, 11 Democrats voted with 143 Republicans in favor of the proposal. The final tally was 154-263. During debate on the Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization bill — the final bill on the House agenda before kicking off a weeklong recess — **Rep. John Campbell (R-Calif.)** offered a motion to recommit that would block all future FAA funds for the John Murtha Johnstown-Cambria County Airport.

The rural airport, which provides six flights a day between Johnstown, Pa., and Washington, D.C., has received about \$150 million in federal dollars. Because of its limited flights, Republicans have referred to it as the “airport for no one.”

“It is both wasteful and irresponsible to use United States taxpayer dollars to continue to subsidize air service to an airport that has received approximately \$150,000,000 in Federal funding, but has achieved no improvement in commercial service provided to the airport without subsidization,” the motion stated.

House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman James Oberstar (D-Minn.) blasted Republicans for bringing forward what he called “the first negative earmarking I’ve experienced in Congress.”

Oberstar said the airport serves 1,000 military personnel. He called the measure “an assault on rural America” because it would put 150 Members at risk of losing funds for their local airports by an act of Congress.

“This is wrong. This is mean-spirited. Vote it down,” Oberstar shouted moments before the vote.

Murtha has been linked to the defunct lobbying firm PMA Group, the subject of an FBI raid last November. The veteran appropriator has provided millions of dollars in earmarks for PMA clients and has received hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from the former lobbying firm and its clients.

House Minority Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio) has said the ethics committee should investigate the relationship between PMA and key lawmakers, including Murtha. Boehner has not formally submitted a complaint to the ethics panel, though.

He called the price tag of the Murtha airport “appalling.”

“Middle-class families and small businesses are struggling during this recession, and asking them to pay even more just to help subsidize Rep. Murtha’s empty ‘monument to me’ is the height of Washington arrogance,” Boehner said in a statement.