

August 31, 2006

Question: A few weeks ago a reader asked what "earmarks" I had requested. For those of you who don't know, earmarks are very specific funding requests made by individual members of Congress or the Senate. Each year, thousands of these projects are included as part of a dozen spending bills that fund the entire government.

Earmarks have come under considerable controversy of late because of the lack of oversight in the process and concerns with overspending. I support reforming the process and think it is important that these projects have a federal connection, are a priority for the local community, and go to public entities rather than private businesses or organizations. If other members are unwilling to implement similar criteria, either through reform or personal discretion, I think we should eliminate the entire process.

In the interests of transparency, I have said that I will make my requests completely clear and public. First of all, I received 70 requests for funding of all kinds of projects. I submitted seven of these 70. I expect that maybe five will be funded in the final appropriations bills which will likely be passed in December. Some members will submit dozens of frivolous "pork" projects among their earmarks. I worked to make sure my requests were all for projects of legitimate community interest and that the money is going to public agencies that are tax or fee supported. So, here they are:

Upper Newport Bay Ecosystem Restoration (\$18 million)

Entity: County of Orange

Description: Funds would be used to restore channels and wetland habitat.

Interstate 5 (I-5) and Ortega Highway (SR-74) Interchange Chokepoint (\$5.6 Million)

Entity: Orange County Transportation Authority

Description: Funds would be used to help reconstruct the San Diego Freeway (I-5)/Ortega Hwy (SR-74) interchange in San Juan Capistrano which will ease congestion along Ortega and I-5 on/off ramps.

Aliso Creek Clean-up and Stabilization (\$18 million)

Entity: County of Orange

Description: Funds would be used for creek erosion stabilization, water cleanup, and riparian habitat restoration.

Irvine Basin Groundwater & Surface Water Improvement Project (\$5 million)

Entity: Irvine Ranch Water District

Description: Funds would be used to develop & maintain a system of manmade wetlands to remove sediment & contaminants.

Irvine Campus Planning and Development (\$900,000)

Entity: Cal State Fullerton

Description: Funds would be used to assist with planning for a permanent campus at the former Marine Corps Air Station at El Toro.

National Fuel Cell Research Center (\$4 Million)

Entity: UC Irvine

This project funded through the Department of Defense will research the development of hydrogen fuel cells to power vehicles.

San Juan Creek Watershed/Doheny State Park Beach Water Quality Study (\$1 Million)

Entity: City of Dana Point

The research generated from this epidemiological study into the impacts of local water quality on human health will be used to evaluate ways to clean local waterways.

This fall, Congress will be wrapping up work on the spending bills to fund the government for next year. I will keep you updated about the fate of these projects.

Until next week, I remain respectfully,

Congressman John Campbell