

Opinion: Still looking for the earmarks ban

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Dec. 18, 2011, Sacramento Bee.*

The \$1.1 trillion spending bill passed by the House of Representatives on Friday includes all kinds of necessary spending and all kinds of earmarks that are far more questionable.

According to U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Oklahoma, the omnibus spending bill includes:

- \$40 million for a "National Bio- and Agro-defense Facility" sought by outgoing Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas.
- \$30 million for the "Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering Teaching and Research Corridor" at the University of Alabama, solicited by Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Alabama.
- \$21 million for the "Yazoo Basin, Mississippi Delta Headwater Project" sought by both senators from Mississippi.

And that's just the start of it. As analysts look deeper into this spending bill, they are sure to find other earmarks far more porky than the ones listed above.

One thing they won't find is authorization of levee work in Natomas that is essential to protect lives and property. The Sacramento region, to be sure, did receive more than \$42 million in appropriations for flood control work already authorized by Congress, and it should be thankful for that. But because of Republican rules restricting use of "earmarks" in the House, Congress has yet to act on the authorization needed to continue the Natomas levee improvements.

The Republican restrictions on earmarks would be easier to

swallow if the House enforced them uniformly. Yet that's not the case. Just this month, Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., released a study that identified 115 earmarks in this year's defense authorization bill worth \$834 million. House Republicans sought 40 of these, and Democrats sought 75.

Read the whole story