

PORK BARONS: One last gasp

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You've got to love the gumption of our Congressional members. In November, voters scream and shout - and vote - that change is needed. Fiscal restraint is needed. And what does Congress do? Spend and spend.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, unveiled on Tuesday a \$1.108 trillion spending package loaded with earmarks. Let's call it the last gasp of the Congressional Pork Barons - though even that is most likely wishful thinking.

Congress had to get a 2011 budget resolved. The country has been running on Continuing Resolutions since last fall. Technically, the government would have run out of money on Saturday. But it would have been nice to see a bill that at the very least held spending to last year's discretionary cap of \$1.089 trillion and a bill free of earmarks.

So much for wishes.

Ironically the Inouye bill includes earmarks sought by legislators who have sworn off the big spending, including Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell. A preliminary analysis by the bipartisan group Taxpayers for Common Sense found some 6,600 earmarks in the bill, worth about \$8 billion (Citizens Against Government Waste defines earmarks as spending designated toward projects the agency in question had not requested). For example, the Pentagon has gone on record saying it doesn't want or need an alternate-engine program for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter jet. But the appropriations bill approved \$450 million for the project anyway. Also included are around \$18 million for nonprofits associated with the late Democrats Sen. Ted Kennedy and Rep. John Murtha and \$6 million for a rural Iowa school program to be named after Iowa Democratic Sen. Tom Harkin. And let's not forget Sen. McConnell, who requested \$650,000 for a genetic technology center at the University of Kentucky - even though he now says he supports a two-year moratorium on earmarks.

South Carolina Republican Sen. Jim DeMint says he will invoke senatorial privilege to require that the entire 1,924-page bill be read aloud before it can be voted on. We can only hope that our elected leaders really listen.