



Defense fund is focus of debate over earmarks

Updated 1d 4h ago |

By [Gregory Korte](#), USA TODAY

Congress is headed for its first big showdown over "earmarks" since the Republican House majority declared a ban on members' pet spending projects earlier this year.

The stakes: A \$1 billion defense fund that House members have dipped into to fund about \$600 million worth of special projects.

The chairman of the [House Armed Services Committee](#) defends the provisions, saying they're not earmarks under House rules because the projects will be competitively awarded, but earmark watchers — and some senators — say Congress should hold the line and not create a loophole to the earmark ban.

"It is really the first test to see how effective the moratorium is, and how it's going to be implemented," said earmark critic Steve Ellis of the Taxpayers for Common Sense.

Here's how "backdoor" earmarks work: A member of Congress introduces an amendment to fund a specific project, with language that requires the award to be "merit-based" or "competitive." Competitive projects aren't earmarks under House rules.

News from [The Oval](#)

Latest posts from USA TODAY The Oval blog

4:46 PM Michelle Obama's trip to Africa underway

3:39 PM Obama impersonator falls flat at GOP group

2:44 PM Obama-Boehner golf report: An enjoyable day

12:13 PM Obama to announce Afghanistan withdrawal decision on Wednesday

12:12 PM Obama touts benefits of foreign

investment in U.S. [Read all The Oval posts](#)

Often, the additional spending is for projects that already exist in a member's district, which could give the district a leg up in the competition.

For example, Rep. [Betty Sutton](#), D-Ohio, secured \$33 million for an initiative to fight what the Pentagon calls its "war on rust." Just weeks before, she attended a groundbreaking for a research center at the

Advertisement



Mom Dilemma #36:
Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

momslike.me
where Local moms meet

Print Powered By [FormatDynamics™](#)



University of Akron in her district to study corrosion with the help of an \$11 million grant in last year's budget.

Rep. **Tim Griffin, R-Ark.**, set aside \$25 million for flight simulators — like the 20 that already exist at **Little Rock Air Force Base**. Griffin told the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* that the base is the logical place for the simulators, but conceded, "They could put them in Timbuktu."

Tom Schatz of the Citizens Against Government Waste said he's matched 59 of the 111 House amendments to previous earmarks.

"It's so clear it's a backdoor effort to get these projects funded," he said. He named House Armed Services Committee Chairman Buck McKeon, R-Calif., the "Porker of the Month."

McKeon spokesman John Noonan said much of the criticism is unwarranted. "They're not earmarks. It's not even a matter of interpretation," he said. But concerns about competition "aren't unfounded," he said, and the committee will follow up with the Pentagon to ensure the competition is genuine.

The **Senate Armed Services Committee** was debating its version of the defense bill Thursday night. Sen. **Claire McCaskill, D-Mo.**, said the Senate should insist on removing anything that looks "earmarky" from the bill. "They're trying to get away with creating a giant loophole on the self-proclaimed ban on earmarks. It's very hypocritical," she said.

For more information about [reprints & permissions](#), visit our [FAQ's](#). To report corrections and clarifications, contact [Standards Editor Brent Jones](#). For publication consideration in the newspaper, send

comments to letters@usatoday.com. Include name, phone number, city and state for verification. To view our corrections, go to corrections.usatoday.com.

Advertisement



Mom Dilemma #36:
Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

momslike me.com
where Local moms meet

Print Powered By  **FormatDynamics**™