

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

What is a lot of money?

What is a lot of money? When I was a child, if I worked real hard I might receive a dollar for my allowance. To me, that was a lot of money. If you received one hundred dollars tomorrow would it be a lot of money? How about \$500 or would it take \$1,000? Surely \$10,000 would be a lot of money. It could help pay for your ever increasing water/sewer and electric bills, especially if, after years of providing skilled and dedicated labor, you find yourself unemployed. Of course, you have also faithfully paid your taxes whether you wanted to or not, but then it does feel good to know you've paid your fair share to keep our government running.

Wouldn't it be nice to have a job where quality performance didn't matter and you could still receive a lot of money, like the 73 employees of AIG that were paid \$1,000,000 (one million dollars) or the 293 employees that had to make do with \$58,460,000 (58 million, 460 thousand dollars) among them. What a great employer to work for. Run your company into the ground and then convince Congress that your company is "too big to fail" and get \$200,000,000,000 (\$200 billion). Then it's party time. I wonder if they will send you a thank you card. How did they convince Congress they deserved such an obscene amount of wealth?

Meanwhile, Vernonia school district has had to hire a lobbyist to talk to congressmen and senators to, maybe, get some help and we'll still have to pay for a bond to replace schools destroyed in the Flood of 2007. Why does it take a lobbyist to get the government to help its citizens? Wouldn't you think since we voted them into office and pay their salaries (and healthcare) they could spare such a small amount (compared to that \$200 billion for AIG) as \$40 million for the schools and maybe \$10 million for sewer. There is the stimulus money that might help with the sewer system, but only if it becomes "shovel ready" by February 2010, then there will still be no guarantee we'll get those funds.

I'll leave you with a quote that seems apropos...

"The two greatest obstacles to democracy in the United States are, first, the delusion among the poor that we have a democracy, and second the chronic terror among the rich lest we get it."

– Father Theodore Edward Dowling (1838-1920)
Anglican Priest and historian



Out of My Mind . . .

by Noni Andersen

Until recent publicity about how AIG spends taxpayers' money, the federal Omnibus Appropriations Act, finally passed by Congress and signed by President Obama, was the cause du jour for outrage over "earmarks."

Worth about \$410 billion, the bill funds nine federal agencies that should have been, but were not, funded last year under regular appropriations for fiscal year 2009.

But what are earmarks, and are they automatically bad? Are they pork or are they needed funding for important local projects?

An earmark is a funding appropriation inserted in a House or Senate bill, preferably, one that is likely to pass both houses of Congress. Earmarks are sometimes "stripped out" of a bill and sometimes retained. No matter who is sponsoring an earmark – one, several, even bipartisan legislators – it is always represented as an important local project.

One recent example of pork was former Sen. Ted Stevens' infamous "bridge to nowhere," an earmark for a multi-million dollar bridge to serve a handful of people. Of course, we also have representatives and senators who get television face time to rail loudly about earmarks while not mentioning their own insertions.

Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) could serve as a model for that particular type of hypocrite. He has been repeatedly on TV proclaiming opposition to earmarks. Of course he doesn't mention his own solo \$51 million in

earmarks, or the combined total of \$140,482,257 in the 164 Congressional earmarks for Kentucky.

Not all earmarks are pork, however, and many, probably most, really are for projects of local importance that need help with funding. To put earmarks into perspective, consider the following Columbia County earmarks in the Omnibus bill:

- \$381,000 to replace essential school equipment in the Vernonia School District that was damaged or destroyed during the December 2007 flood. Funds will purchase equipment such as computers, telephones, laboratory equipment, chairs and desks, cafeteria equipment, and chalkboards.

- \$475,000 for reconstruction of the West Oregon Electric Cooperative. One of the cooperative's distribution substations was destroyed during the December 2007 flood. This money will help construct a distribution substation outside the floodplain and provide energy security to the region.

- \$476,000 to be used for hospital planning, construction, and infrastructure for building of the Columbia River Community Hospital in St. Helens, providing diagnostic equipment and a full-time emergency room.

Other projects included in the Omnibus Appropriations Act that are not in Columbia County, but affect all Oregonians include the following:

- \$200,000 for research in protecting weak salmon stock

- \$444,000 for research on environmental and

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