

By threatening to veto the defense appropriations bill if it included money for more F-22 stealth fighter planes, President Obama signaled that he was going to put an end to the way business has been done in Washington. We applaud the president's announcement, but so far it is more symbolic than real.

The same week the Senate voted to cut funding for additional F-22s, for a savings of \$1.75 billion, the Senate Armed Services Committee added another \$9 billion in earmarks to the 2010 defense authorization bill. Earmarks direct money to a specific program or company in a member's district for something that has not been requested by the Pentagon and has not been subject to any public review or hearing. It is a gift from a member to a constituent, a gesture that usually is repaid with a generous campaign contribution.

Even if the president succeeds in blocking additional funding for the F-22 and for other programs Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has identified as unnecessary, core defense spending for next year will actually increase by \$21 billion. And to make matters worse, every dollar spent on the military is a dollar borrowed from the Chinese or Japanese governments, a dollar that must be repaid with interest. Including costs assigned to other departments, total United States spending on the military approaches \$1 trillion a year.

The defense budget is no longer just about defense. Rather, it has become a system of corporate welfare driven by jobs and campaign contributions, the military-industrial complex that President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned about in his 1961 farewell address.

Congress has moved to make the earmark process more transparent. But ever-resourceful members of Congress have found a way around tighter reporting rules. The biggest portion of money doled out by the Senate Armed Services Committee was \$4.3 million for "no member request" earmarks, a blatant move to circumvent rules requiring members of Congress to disclose the earmarks they have given out.

Last week the House had its turn at the trough. The Defense Appropriations subcommittee's bill included 1,116 earmarks added by House members worth \$2.75 billion. When the bill came to the House floor on July 30, Republican Congressmen Jeff Flake of Arizona and John Campbell of California offered amendments to strip 553 earmarks worth \$2.7 billion from the bill. Their amendments were overwhelmingly defeated.

Bipartisanship is the name of the game when it comes to earmarks. Because they control key chairmanships, Democrats have an edge in the current Congress, but should the Republicans regain majorities in either chamber, rest assured they will give their Democratic colleagues a run for the money.

The pay-to-play aspect of earmarks has embarrassed members of Congress, as well it should, but each year they continue to give out literally thousands of earmarks, and almost half are added to the Defense Department funding bills. In 2008, according to Taxpayers for Common Sense, members of Congress added 11,234 named earmarks totaling \$14.8 billion to congressional funding bills. Another \$3.5 billion in earmarks were added with no sponsor

identified.

In April, Democratic congressman Paul Hodes of New Hampshire introduced legislation that would break the link between earmarks and campaign contributions. His bill would prohibit a member of Congress from taking a contribution from any person or company that has gotten an earmark from that member. It is very straightforward and it would go a long way toward ensuring that our defense policy is not driven by the defense industry's spending on lobbying and campaign contributions.

So far, Hodes has gotten only six Democrats and three Republicans to cosponsor his bill, which is hardly encouraging. Both Obama and his Republican challenger, Senator John McCain, railed against earmarks during the 2008 campaign, but neither has endorsed the Hodes bill.

McCain strongly backed Obama's threat to veto the defense bill if it contained money for additional F-22s. The next logical step would be for both McCain and Obama to get behind Hodes's bill. Until they do, it is still business as usual in Washington.