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'Pig Book': Congressional 'pork' hits \$19.6 billion in 2009

Citizens Against Government Waste released its annual report on 'pork barrel' projects Tuesday

By [Gail Russell Chaddock](#) | Staff writer/ April 14, 2009 edition

WASHINGTON

Capitol Hill lawmakers added 10,160 pet projects – aka “pork barrel” projects – to this year’s government spending, fewer than in the previous budget cycle but at a higher total cost.

That’s the bottom line from the Pig Book, a list of member projects inserted in annual spending bills released Tuesday by Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW). The watchdog group, which has issued the Pig Book each year since 1991, calls it “the book Washington doesn’t want you to read.”

For the record: The 10,160 projects – valued at \$19.6 billion – represent a 14 percent increase in the amount of money sent to taxpayers over last year’s spending on “pork.” That’s even though the number of projects went down 12.5 percent during the same period.

“Everyone in Washington has promised a new era of transparency and restraint in earmarks, from President Obama to the leaders of both parties in Congress,” said CAGW president Tom Schatz in a briefing Tuesday. “Sadly, the hard numbers from the 2009 appropriations bills tell a different story. The current Democratic congressional majority is following the same trajectory as their Republican predecessors. They came into power promising to cut earmarks and made a big show of it during the first two years. However, as the 2009 Pig Book amply illustrates, pork-barrel spending is growing fast.”

Ferreting out sponsors of congressional earmarks was once devilishly complex. But as of fiscal year 2008, Congress has required members to identify their own earmarks. Does that mean the Pig Book is obsolete?

Hardly, reformers say, because the issue now is enforcement.

“Until fiscal year 2008, we never saw a name next to an earmark. That was a watershed moment for lawmakers and taxpayers, to see a project with a name next to it,” says David Williams, CAGW vice president for public policy. “Unfortunately, this year we saw a little backsliding with more anonymous earmarks, especially in the defense.”

Of the 10,160 projects in this year’s Pig Book, CAGW identified 221 earmarks worth \$7.8 billion that

funded in violation of Congress's own transparency rules.

As in years past, Alaska leads the nation with \$221 million in earmarks, or \$322 per capita. Hawaii, \$302 million in earmarks, or \$235 per capita, ranks No. 2.

The name of former Sen. Ted Stevens (R) of Alaska – longtime chairman of the Senate Appropriatic Committee, whose conviction on corruption charges was dismissed by a federal judge last week – v scrubbed from the 2009 omnibus spending bill and his earmarks assigned to Sen. Lisa Murkowski (Alaska, CAGW officials note.

The practice of earmarking has been an early flash point between Mr. Obama, who campaigned to c Washington, and the new Congress. When the White House last month signaled that the president propose a “different way” of handling earmarks, Democratic leaders in the House and Senate warne off.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said “legislatively initiated proposals” in spending bills are “an appropri function of the Congress of the United States.”

Senate majority leader Harry Reid noted: “Since we’ve been a country, we have had the obligation, i Congress, to help direct spending.”

But Obama and congressional Democrats both agree that earmarks should be fewer and more trans

That standard, however, has yet to be met, says Taxpayers for Common Sense, another public-inter group that tracks government spending. One issue: Effective this month, members are required to li of their earmarks on their official websites.

“Unfortunately, many members created a labyrinth that made finding their list of requests difficult or impossible, proving again a lesson learned long ago: simply posting information on the Web is not transparency,” said Taxpayers for Common Sense in an April 10 report.

Moreover, executive-branch transparency isn’t much better. “Many executive branch budget docume scattered across the federal agencies, buried on websites that require an advanced degree in electr archeology to dig out,” the report added.

Last week, Obama sent a \$83.4 billion supplemental budget request to Congress to fund the wars ir and Afghanistan and other foreign operations. At the time, he signaled to congressional leaders that he would not accept earmarks or unrelated items in the bill.