

# La. lawmakers promise fight to keep earmarks

## *Bush taking aim at appropriations*

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WASHINGTON -- Louisiana lawmakers promised a fight over President Bush's declaration of war against congressional earmarks.

The White House said the president would sign an executive order today directing agencies to ignore any future earmarks that are not written into law and promised to veto any appropriation that doesn't cut earmarks by 50 percent.

"The people's trust in their government is undermined by congressional earmarks," Bush said in remarks prepared for his final State of the Union address Monday night to a joint session of Congress.

Some fiscal conservatives complained that Bush's executive order won't do any-

thing to block the nearly 10,000 earmarks worth nearly \$17 billion in the giant spending bill Congress adopted last month, including about \$142 million for Louisiana. The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think-tank, noted that by the time agencies begin reviewing 2009 appropriations, a new president and Cabinet will be in power.

But Louisiana lawmakers, who have relied on earmarks to finance hurricane recovery efforts, educational projects and research at Louisiana universities, said Congress shouldn't accept the president's executive order without a fight.

"Louisianians know all too well the perils of leaving the power of the purse to appointed, faceless bureaucrats holed up in Washington, D.C.," said Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee. "Time and again since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the devastating federal levee breaks that followed, direct funding by elected representatives filled the gaps the bureaucracy left behind."

### CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Landrieu said that in the most recent spending bill she was able to get financing for mental health services to New Orleans children still suffering the psychological effects of the hurricanes -- money that had been rejected by the Bush administration -- as well as continued spending for bomb-resistant vehicles built in the New Orleans area to protect U.S. soldiers in Iraq from roadside bombs.

**Rep. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman, a member of the House Appropriations Committee, said, "I think it's very unfair for the president or anybody else to lead the public to believe that earmarks are costly."**

**Alexander said Congress carves out spending based on budget limits set by congressional budget committees and the White House, and that reallocating money differently than the White House wants doesn't add additional costs. He said it only directs money items other than those proposed by the president.**

**Alexander complained that Bush**

**seems to be suggesting that federal agencies can spend money for "earmarks" the administration supports, but not for projects favored by Congress.**

**"The executive might not even know where St. Joseph, Louisiana is, and not know the needs of a port or a microscope for the University of Louisiana-Monroe or money that Representative (Richard) Baker and I requested for the study of eradicating Formosan termites," Alexander said.**

Sen. David Vitter, R-La., said he agreed with Bush that "we have a lot more work to do to get federal spending under control," although he stopped short of endorsing the White House plan to block future earmarks.

Vitter said that "earmarks have been horribly abused in some instances," noting the so-called bridge to nowhere in Alaska, and said he supported a measure adopted last year to require sponsors of earmarks to identify themselves. But he said that Congress should adopt "further tightening and reform."