

Alexander keeps vital panel seat

Representative reappointed to Appropriations Committee

By Greg Hilburn

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ghilburn@thenewsstar.com

Fifth District U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander has held onto his coveted seat on the powerful House Appropriations Committee, he first reported to *The News-Star's* editorial board on Wednesday.

Alexander had feared he would lose the seat after the Democrats took control of the House following the mid-term elections.

"I guess the good Lord knew that the 5th District, as poor as it is, needed somebody on Appropriations," Alexander said, only half-joking, during a teleconference from his Washington office.

The Appropriations Committee decides how to spend the federal government's money.

Alexander has used his spot on the committee to secure funding for northeastern Louisiana projects like the Monroe Regional Airport, the University of Louisiana at Monroe College of Pharmacy and the Greater Ouachita Port.

Much of that funding for local projects came through what are known as earmarks, on which the Democrats have declared a one-year moratorium. In fact, about \$17 million in earmarks for 12 northeastern Louisiana projects are at risk in the pending budget.

Alexander said he will be in a better position to preserve those earmarks from his seat on Appropriations.

"We'll stand behind every earmark that we've secured," he said.

Sue Edmunds, president of the Monroe Chamber of Commerce, called Alexander's assignment "hugely important for us."

"It's excellent news for our community and reflective of his effectiveness that he was able to retain his seat even after the Republicans lost the majority," Edmunds said.

Alexander is the only Louisiana congressman on the House Appropriations Committee, which includes 29 Republicans and 37 Democrats.

He said U.S. Rep. Jerry Lewis of California, the ranking Republican on Appropriations, hasn't assigned subcommittees yet.

"My top priority for a subcommittee is Agriculture," said Alexander, who has served on the Agriculture Subcommittee since his appointment to Appropriations.