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Federal plan allocates \$134m for state

Telegraph, The (Nashua, NH) - Friday, February 27, 2009

Author: KEVIN LANDRIGAN ; *Staff Writer*

CONCORD - A pending federal spending bill contains more than \$134 million in New Hampshire earmarked projects that span from the northern White Mountain Forest to the Nashua river along the Massachusetts border.

Locally, the legislation would spend money to continue planning for a commuter rail line from Lowell, Mass., through Nashua to Manchester along with grants for water/sewer treatment, the care of homeless veterans and electronic medical record keeping, and to renovate the local Boys & Girls Club.

The state's two U.S. senators defended the process.

Republican Sen. Judd Gregg said he plans to vote against the bill because it's too expensive.

"Well, I believe the omnibus that's working its way through here is too high. I don't think we need to increase spending. I think it should be frozen," Gregg said during an interview on CNN.

But Gregg said earmarks have a place in Congress as long as they are publicly known and can be voted up or down.

"I think once you set a very stringent upper limit on an appropriating bill . . . the Congress should have the right to allocate funds under that limit in a reasonable way, as long as there's still transparency," Gregg said.

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, a Democrat, said she hasn't read this omnibus spending bill and has no position on it.

Earmarks can be acceptable as long as they are done in the light of day and are subject to removal if the Senate majority wants to take them out, Shaheen told reporters.

"My position on earmarks as I said during the campaign is I think we need to be more transparent and make sure whoever is presenting the earmark and we know what that is for," Shaheen told reporters during a conference call Thursday.

"There are some occasions we have projects that we need to support that way."

Shaheen cited as an example the region's largest benefactor in this bill, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard with four earmarks totaling \$35.2 million.


Democratic U.S. Rep. Carol Shea-Porter, additionally inserted into the bill a \$2.4 million to study advanced maintenance and monitoring technology for government-run shipyards like Portsmouth.

Shaheen said during her six years as governor, she learned some spending doesn't fit neatly into the budget bill that New Hampshire lawmakers work on every two years and Congress must deal with annually.

During his speech to Congress on Tuesday, President Obama repeated his call to eliminate congressional earmarks. He'd taken a pledge to oppose them while campaigning last year.

Congressional Quarterly reported Wednesday, however, this bill includes an earmark Obama had

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signed on to many months earlier - \$7.7 million for the Tribally Controlled Postsecondary Vocational Institutions.

Vice President Joe Biden, as Delaware's senior senator last year, signed on to many of the earmarks in this bill.

Congressional leaders have claimed they've significantly cut the number of earmarks in spending bills. The watchdog group Taxpayers for Common Sense concluded otherwise this week.

All told, spending bills the Congress passed last fall and this big one still pending contain \$14.3 billion in earmarks.

That would be a decline of \$500 million or only 3 percent less than all the earmarks Congress passed during the 2007 budget process.

Gregg contributed to this bill \$92 million of earmarks, nearly three times as much as those the other three members of the delegation had requested without his support.

Many of the projects Gregg asked for had the support of either ex-Sen. John E. Sununu or the state's two House members, Democrats US. Rep. Paul Hodes and Shea-Porter.

Gregg is a longtime member of the Senate Appropriations Committee and past chairman of a key subcommittee that wrote the budget for the federal Departments of Commerce and Justice.

Starting Wednesday afternoon, Gregg's office pumped out news this bill includes four projects of interest to him including \$475,000 to expand programs at the Dalianis House for homeless veterans in Nashua.

But that's only the beginning.

Other Gregg-only projects include a \$200,000 in weather technology at Plymouth State University, \$750,000 for advanced law enforcement research at the University of New Hampshire in Durham, \$800,000 for low pressure, inflatable tents for the Army, \$1.4 million in support of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail in the White Mountains and \$143,000 to support a City Year program in Stratham.

In this bill, Hodes requested on his own \$100,000 for pre-disaster training in the North County city of Berlin, \$243,000 for commercial driver license training at the White Mountains Community College in Berlin, \$196,514 for the New Hampshire Community Loan Fund and \$370,000 for an anti-domestic violence advocacy project to New Hampshire Legal Assistance based in Manchester.

Shea-Porter's own list includes \$190,000 for the University of New Hampshire-owned commuter bus service, \$185,000 in digital radio and evidence gathering equipment for the Portsmouth Police Department, \$333,000 for the Manchester Community Health Center and \$119,000 for a training program in precision manufacturing based in Manchester.

Former Sen. John Sununu lost to Shaheen last November but before leaving asked on his own for seven earmarks that got into this pending bill.

Among them were \$950,000 in improvements to the White Mountain Regional Airport, \$285,000 to acquire and demolish fire-damaged housing in Berlin and several technology projects such as \$1.2 million to speed up foreign language training for the military and federal intelligence agencies.

What they asked for:

The state's four-member congressional delegation requested 83 earmarked projects totaling \$135 million in a pending, federal spending bill, according to an analysis by The Telegraph.

A watchdog group concluded the bill contained 8,500 projects requested from members of Congress totaling \$7.7 billion.

Here's how many each New Hampshire member of Congress asked for individually without an endorsement from any of the other three:

- Republican Sen. Judd Gregg: 26;
- Democratic Congresswoman Carol Shea-Porter: 9;
- Democratic Congressman Paul Hodes: 8;
- Ex-Republican Sen. John E. Sununu: 7.

Source: Taxpayers for Common Sense analysis, February 2009.

Compiled by staff writer Kevin Landrigan

Projects at a glance:

The following are earmarked projects for the Nashua region contained in an omnibus, \$400 billion federal spending bill that's cleared the US House of Representatives and is pending in the Senate.

Most of the money is to continue operations in federal agencies, as Congress and former President Bush failed last year to reach agreement on separate bills to keep spending money past the end of next week.

Next to the project are the names of members of the state's congressional delegation who requested the earmarks.

The 83 specific requests were made during 2008 so new U.S. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, a Democrat, was not there to ask for or support. The incumbent she defeated, Republican U.S. Sen. John E. Sununu, authored some and signed on in support of others. Rep. Sen. Judd Gregg, requested the bulk of the group, but Reps. Paul Hodes and Democratic Rep. Carol Shea-Porter both endorsed others on their own and with other lawmakers.

- Nashua Commuter Rail Project: \$1.9 million to analyze alternatives of extending rail service from Lowell, Mass. through Nashua and on to Manchester (Hodes, Shea-Porter);
- Nashua downtown riverfront: \$190,000 for design of development plan (Gregg, Hodes);
- Southern New Hampshire Medical Center: \$404,000 for technology and equipment for electronic medical records keeping. (Gregg, Sununu);
- Nashua Sewer Project: \$400,000 towards the combined sewer outflow project (Gregg);
- Boys and Girls Club of Greater Nashua: \$285,000 to expand and renovate the Nashua property (Gregg);
- **Harbor Homes** : \$475,000 for two new supportive housing programs at Nashua shelter for homeless veterans (Gregg, Sununu, Hodes).

Source: Taxpayers for Common Sense analysis, February 2009

Compiled by staff writer Kevin Landrigan

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