

Lewis backs defense bill spending

EARMARKS: Inland-area companies stand to earn millions if the military funding package is signed into law.

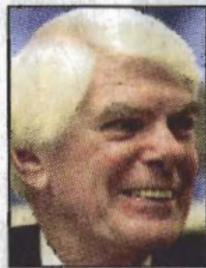
BY BEN GOAD
WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — A \$636 billion military spending bill passed Thursday by the House contains more than \$70 million in federal earmarks inserted by Rep. Jerry Lewis for defense firms with Inland branches and other area institutions.

Lewis, R-Redlands, said the funding would go for proven and

worthwhile projects and create work in job-starved Inland Southern California. But he's also pleased with what's not in the bill: the funding and authority needed for the Obama administration to close the federal detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The Defense Department appropriations bill, the last of 12 annual spending bills that fund the federal government, passed by a vote of 400-30. The Senate will next consider its own defense bill, and the two versions must be reconciled before the final product can head to the president's desk.



Rep. Jerry Lewis

has more than 1,100 earmarks totaling roughly \$2.75 billion, according to Taxpayers for Common Sense, a Washington-based government watchdog group that tracks the use of earmarks. Among them were 19 secured by Lewis totaling \$71.5 million.

But most earmarks — funding requests that lawmakers insert into bills for projects they favor — usually remain in the final version of the bill.

The defense bill

Would-be funding recipients include ESRI, a Redlands-based mapping software firm set to receive \$11 million for a pair of military projects, and Magneto Inductive USA, a company with a San Bernardino location that would get \$9 million for a high-tech surveillance and communications system.

The bill also contains \$6 million to pay for infrastructure improvements at the former Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino and two earmarks totaling \$8 million for research on brain scanning and cancer at Loma Linda University Medical Center.

All of the earmarks would go to projects that have received previous federal funding. Lewis maintained all have been carefully vetted to ensure they will create jobs and aid the military.

But earmark critics say that without a formal accreditation system in place, lawmakers are apt to steer money toward firms whose management contributes to their campaigns.

"The vast majority of private company earmarks are in the defense bills," said Steve Ellis, vice president of Taxpayers for Common Sense. "It is really

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ground zero for some of those concerns.”

Officials at firms in line to receive some of the funding have contributed to Lewis' campaign account, and some spend money on lobbyists who have close relationships with him. But Lewis has long said he pays no attention to such payments, and recipients have said they've never been pres-

sured to contribute or hire lobbyists to get the veteran lawmaker's attention.

Members of the Appropriations Committee's defense subcommittee attached roughly a third of the earmarked dollars, according to the taxpayers group.

As the top Republican on the full committee, Lewis is automatically considered a member of every subcommittee and is well positioned to steer funding to the region.

Rep. Ken Calvert, R-Coro-

na, a less-senior member of the panel, attached five earmarks totaling more than \$16 million to the bill. One allocates \$10 million for a variety of projects at the U.S. Naval Surface Warfare Center's Corona division.

Rep. Joe Baca, D-Rialto, secured \$2 million to clean up wells contaminated by perchlorate, a rocket-fuel additive found in Inland water supplies.

Absent in the bill is \$100 million requested by the Obama administration

for the Pentagon to close Guantanamo Bay. House members from both parties rejected the request, citing concerns over a perceived lack of a plan for what to do with the prisoners held there.

Lewis attached language to the bill that would prevent any detainees from being released or transferred until the administration conducts an assessment.

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