



## Congress Brushes Off \$20 Billion as ‘Table Scraps’

Before leaving town for Christmas, Congress went on another budget-busting spending spree and charged all the goodies to the taxpayers. And the bill actually is a lot higher — \$20 billion more — than lawmakers would have you believe.

Many in Congress say they acted responsibly in hurriedly passing an omnibus budget bill because, in combination with earlier defense appropriations, it keeps discretionary spending for fiscal 2008 in line with President Bush’s cap of \$932 billion.

In fact, though, Congress used budget gimmicks and loopholes to fudge the numbers. Meanwhile, senators and representatives piled on the pork by earmarking billions to more than 11,300 of their pet projects.

Result: Lawmakers approved a bill that actually puts the government more than \$20 billion over budget.

To obscure this overspending, Congress employed such gimmicks as classifying items as “emergency” spending — because money designated that way isn’t counted against the top line.

However, almost none of this spending fits the definition of a true emergency. For example, Congress allocated \$100 million for “emergency” security at next summer’s Democratic and Republican national

conventions — which always meet every four years.

To some in Washington, \$20 billion over budget may not sound like much.

Both House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid both recently dismissed a larger amount, \$23 billion, as a “small difference” with the president. House Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey (D-Wisc.) shrugged it off as “table scraps.”

But \$20 billion is real money to taxpayers. To reach that amount would take every federal income tax dollar paid in 2005 by residents of North Dakota, Vermont, Wyoming, South Dakota, Montana, Alaska, Delaware and Maine combined.

Put another way, \$20 billion is more than all the federal income taxes paid in 34 states and the District of Columbia. Obey’s “table scraps” dwarf the annual income tax burdens in all but the largest metropolitan areas.

For the taxpayers’ sake, Congress should have held true to pledges of fiscal responsibility early this year by refusing to resort to loopholes, earmarks and other gimmicks.

President Bush also promised to rein in earmarks and wasteful spending. Now he has several options to follow through on that promise. Taxpayers will watch with interest.

**For more information on the omnibus spending bill, go to:**

[www.heritage.org/Research/Budget/wm1737.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Budget/wm1737.cfm)

[www.heritage.org/Research/Budget/wm1751.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Budget/wm1751.cfm)