

Lawmakers shift earmark strategy

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- Despite U.S. congressional ethics reform to cut spending on pork barrel projects, some lawmakers are turning to so-called "soft" earmarks, critics say. Congress enacted tough ethics reform in 2007 mandating members reveal when they used committee reports and other measures to target funds to special projects -- a spending measure called an earmark. But "soft" earmarks, or measures that include less-explicit support for projects by using language that "endorses" them, still allow lawmakers to steer federal funds to their favorite programs, The New York Times said Monday. Soft earmarks tend to show up in spending bills for federal diplomatic agencies and some lawmakers said they feel pressured by such agencies to pass measures in their favor. Ethics measures on "hard" earmarks were meant to curb what the Congressional Research Service said amounted to about \$20 billion last year, but the softer version still runs a big tab, with one 2006 measure appropriating \$3 billion to a project. "No matter what you want to call it, an earmark is an earmark," Rep. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., a critic of earmarks, said.

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