

Senate has chance to show responsibility on spending bill

by *The Detroit News*

It's a long shot for sure, but the irresponsible spending bill produced by Congress just may come off the tracks this week. If it does, taxpayers will score a rare victory.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., was forced last week to postpone a vote on the \$410 billion measure, which would keep the federal government operating until the fall, because he didn't have the 60 votes needed to get it passed. Republicans, with the backing of a few Democrats, are blocking the bill because of its cost and because they weren't allowed to offer any amendments.

The horse-trading now begins. GOP senators will likely be given a chance to put their amendments to a vote. But the real test will be whether spending is actually trimmed back to a more responsible level and the pork sliced out of the bill.

The package contains 7,991 pet projects totaling \$5.5 billion — not a huge percentage, but symbolic of Congress' tone deafness. Nearly every other government body in America has had to slash spending and conserve revenue to deal with the recession. And yet Congress passes an 8 percent spending increase, which it will fund by writing yet another check on future taxpayers.

It flies in the face of the Obama administration's promise of more responsible federal spending.

The earmarks added by both parties include the usual array of payoffs to the folks back home.

Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, slipped in \$1.7 million to study how to make pig manure less stinky. And Michigan's Carl Levin, a Democrat, secured \$3.8 million to save a piece of Tiger Stadium, not nearly enough to get the project done, but enough to delay again completion of the long-overdue demolition.

Taxpayers are fed up with this kind of reckless handling of their money. President Barack Obama promised to end wasteful spending and to justify every dollar spent. Congress must not have believed him.

If the few fiscally responsible senators can't succeed in reducing the cost of this bill, then Obama should veto it, or see his pledge of fiscal responsibility reduced to just one more empty campaign promise.

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