

## If you veto one, then veto them all

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The issue: Legislative earmarks.

We suggest: A good beginning.

More legislative earmarks directed to local projects survived this year's legislative process than were vetoed.

More than two-thirds of the projects stayed in the final budget signed into law by Gov. Bobby Jindal.

Many of the projects which were vetoed were meant for non-governmental organizations, which in many cases are exempt from the same strict accountability standards as government entities.

On the one hand, there were a lot of vetoes, meaning at least some of the projects placed in the budget by individual legislators didn't make it into law.

Jindal vetoed about \$16 million in legislative projects that would have gone to all sorts of purposes throughout the state.

Although there is a certain sting when a local project is cut off the funding list, overall it is great news in a state that has historically allowed legislators a lot of discretion in passing out discretionary money to local projects -- money that many refer to as slush and pork.

Jindal, in vetoing so many of the earmarks, raised some hackles in the Legislature.

And he lived up to his campaign promises that he would demand more fiscal responsibility.

On the other hand, though, many of these projects made it through the process and the state will pay tens of millions of dollars for causes that never underwent legislative scrutiny -- projects that were never publically vetted or subjected to the conventional budgeting process.

There is a budget process and that is the proper process for getting these projects passed and paid for.

So clearly there is work yet to be done.

We come down squarely behind the suggestion of the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, which applauded Jindal for his vetoes and urged more of the same next year.

The nonpartisan good-government group urged Jindal to veto every local earmark in the future.

The basic argument is that these spending measures circumvent the budget process and take money away from real state priorities such as roads, bridges, coastal restoration and flood protection.

PAR has floated the idea of establishing a revolving loan and grant fund that would require projects to apply for the money and, in many instances, repay it.

That system would be head and shoulders over what we have now ó when a legislator's whim or the governor's fickle veto pen arbitrarily awards or takes away money from similar projects.

For instance, Jindal vetoed money that was to go to a hot-air balloon festival in Baton Rouge, but he allowed \$50,000 for the Christmas Festival in Natchitoches to remain in the budget.

If there were a uniform process for these causes to apply for and receive the money they need, the taxpayers would get a better deal and, in the end, so would every one of the worthwhile causes.

Jindal made a good start with his vetoes this year, but we encourage a more long-term approach to a policy problem that remains.

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