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Area gets \$9 million in earmarks THE PROJECTS

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BY EMILY BATTLE
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The Fredericksburg area will see at least \$9 million from the federal spending bill that President Obama signed earlier this week, according to a review of data compiled by the group Taxpayers for Common Sense.

The Fredericksburg Area Museum and Cultural Center will get \$190,000 for exhibits and educational programs.

Germanna Community College will see \$285,000 for training and equipment for the nursing program at its Locust Grove campus.

Stafford County will receive \$150,000 for a stormwater management study.

These are just a few of the local funding requests that were granted in a \$410 billion spending bill that has been criticized by both Republicans and Obama as being flawed.

At issue have been "earmarks," the spending requests that members of Congress insert into a bill. Obama has been criticized for approving the bill with its \$8 billion in earmarks, despite having campaigned against the practice.

The president said this week that he hopes to launch measures to reform the process in the future.

Most of the earmarks that will come to the Fredericksburg area were requested by Rep. Rob Wittman, R-1st.

Wittman voted against the spending bill, saying it represented too large an increase in federal spending. He also said he was concerned that the bill's approval process included no wholesale means of vetting the roughly 9,000 earmarks it includes.

Rep. Eric Cantor, R-7th, also voted against the bill. Cantor submitted no earmark requests, and has criticized Obama for signing the spending bill.

Virginia Democratic Sens. Mark Warner and Jim Webb both supported the bill.

Wittman has said several times in the past that he looks for three criteria when constituents ask him to make funding requests: They need to be for public use, have broad support from their communities and include a state or local match.

Wittman submitted \$139 million worth of appropriation requests for fiscal 2009, according to his Web site, but only a fraction of those were funded.

Wittman requests that didn't get funding in this budget include \$3 million for a riverfront park in downtown Fredericksburg.

City officials have estimated the park will cost \$4 million--money they don't have--and the city's Economic Development Authority is now discussing contributing a small amount to try to get work started.

Wittman also requested \$8 million for a new Interstate 95 interchange between the Rappahannock River and State Route 3 in Fredericksburg, and \$2 million for a new I-95 interchange at U.S. 17 in Spotsylvania.

Only the Spotsylvania interchange ended up in the budget, and it will receive only \$95,000 in 2009.

Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization administrator Lloyd Robinson said he knew some local officials had been advocating for funding for the Spotsylvania interchange, so he was not surprised to see it receive an earmark.

The interchange is one of the priority interstate projects in FAMPO's 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan, passed several months ago. However, two other I-95 interchange projects were scored at a slightly higher priority level: the Fredericksburg interchange near Celebrate Virginia, and one in Stafford at Courthouse Road.

--Reporters Kelly Hannon and Pamela Gould contributed to this report.

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The more than \$9 million in local projects in the \$410 billion federal spending bill include:

\$285,000 for training and equipment for the nursing program at Germanna Community College

\$190,000 for exhibits and educational programs at the Fredericksburg Area Museum and Cultural Center

\$150,000 for a stormwater management study in Stafford County

\$95,000 toward a new Interstate 95 interchange at U.S. 17 in Spotsylvania County

\$1,187,500 for a traffic circle at the intersection of U.S. 1 and State Route 619 at the entrance to Marine Corps Base Quantico

\$870,000 for dredging in the Little Wicomico River in Northumberland County

\$1.5 million for land acquisition at the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge

\$5 million to purchase new locomotives for Virginia Railway Express

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