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WELL, SENATORS?

U.S. Sens. Lindsey Graham and Jim DeMint announced last week that they've bagged more than \$44 million in appropriations for South Carolina - well, make that for part of South Carolina. The commerce, justice and science bill appropriates only \$500,000 to the Grand Strand and Pee Dee - \$200,000 of it for the Myrtle Beach trade center. That's far less than Graham had led local leaders to expect.

Meanwhile, our intrepid senators remain proud co-sponsors of a Senate bill that would wipe out all the special-project earmarks in the transportation bill that Congress passed earlier this year, including more than \$40 million for Interstate 73. Unless they put I-73 on the line along with the transportation earmarks that amount to irresponsible pork, they explain, Congress won't take seriously their efforts to offset Katrina relief with cuts in unnecessary spending. They hasten to add that they think I-73 (a key to job growth and wealth creation in the Grand Strand and Pee Dee) to be a responsible project that will get funding, their political gamesmanship notwithstanding.

OK, this is inside-the-Beltway logic, which straight-talking folks are not given to understand. That's probably why we also don't understand how the appropriations that DeMint and Graham trumpeted last week avoided the Katrina chopping block. If our interstate link is expendable, what about the \$2.3 million for the Southern Shrimp Alliance, the \$4.5 million for prosecutorial training, the \$600,000 for the Richland Learning Center, the \$300,000 for a DNA forensics lab at Claflin University, the \$2.05 million for something called Caro-Coops, the \$467,000 for a "height modernization regional expansion project," and the \$13 million for a National Textile Center? We're just not sophisticated enough to understand why these projects are a lock while I-73 is not. ...

Wait a minute. Here's one conclusion we can draw: The Grand Strand and Pee Dee don't matter to the senators' future political plans.

If the folks in this part of South Carolina should draw some other conclusion from I-73's chopping-block status and the chump change thrown us in the appropriations bill, the senators might enlighten us about what that is. Readers who don't want to wait for their response can call Graham at (202) 224-5972 and DeMint at (202) 224-6121.

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