

FORT COLLINS COLORADOAN

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Today's weather

Breezy and warmer



High today: 56

Low tonight: 22

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Musgrave, Udall aim to cut fat

Plan seeks review of items attached to bills

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DENVER — In an uncommon partnership, two of Colorado's U.S. Representatives are trying to reduce wasteful spending by ensuring that roads to

nowhere and cowgirl halls of fame aren't unknowingly being funded in the dark of the night.

Democrat Rep. Mark Udall and Republican Rep. Marilyn Musgrave announced Thursday morning the proposal of a statute

each item.

"It in effect makes the spending process more transparent and specific and therefore promotes accountability," Udall said. "It's a practical, effective and best of all, constitutional, version of the line-item veto."



MUSGRAVE



UDALL

The Supreme Court declared the line-item veto unconstitutional in 1996. As

deficit spending drives up interest rates, Musgrave said members of Congress need to be held accountable for earmarks that often put quietly into appropriations bills in committee meetings.

"We both support earmarks, but what we want is light of day on these earmarks," Musgrave said. "We just want the transparency and the openness in this process." Musgrave used the example of her earmark to get funding for research at Fort Collins' Centers for Disease Control as a responsible spending item.

Earmarks by some other members of Congress are unnecessary pork, she said.

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Fat

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This includes funding last year for a \$223 million bridge from Ketchikan, Ala., where the population is 8,900, to Gravina Island, where the population is 50.

Most of the time, she said, Congress doesn't even know it's voting for such items.

The statute, called the Stimulating Leadership in Cutting Expenditures Act, or SLICE, would force members of Congress to defend and explain their earmarks, with the aim of preventing wasteful spending in the face of what Udall and Musgrave called a budgetary crisis.

While reducing wasteful spending is a step in the right direction, it won't be enough to fix the budgetary shortfall the country is facing, said Jamie Lang, executive director of the Fort Collins-based Commonsense Coalition, a nonpartisan group that looks at solutions to economic decline.

The coalition predicts a \$51 trillion shortfall in the next 80

to 100 years as the result of tax deductions and promised increases in benefits. This statute is a step in the right direction, Lang said, but could also be used detrimentally as part of a political game.

"I could see someone putting in a good piece of legislation in appropriations that's fiscally responsible but not on the president's agenda," Lang said. The president would then be able to cross it out, he said.

Musgrave commended Colorado's legislative process, which limits bill amendments to those that fit under the bill's title to ensure they are germane to the topic at hand. She said she would also like to see this sort of discretion at the national level to reduce wasteful spending.

SLICE can only go into effect with support from the Senate and approval from the president, who called on Congress to give him such power in his State of the Union Address this year.

Udall expressed hope that could happen. "If the two of us can stand up here and agree on this approach, we think our colleagues will be able to do so as well," he said.