

## April 1, 2009 - How Many Would Turn the Money Down?

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Here's the question for critics who assail the federal budget earmarking prowess of U.S. Rep. John P. Murtha, D-Johnstown: Would you beat the anti-Murtha drum so loudly, or at all, if the veteran congressman were representing your district? Would you look at all the defense-related contractors setting up shop, and all the residual jobs they provide, and say, "Sorry, Jack, but we don't want any more of that around here"?

We have a hard time believing that anyone would find fault if they had a representative working as diligently and effectively as Jack Murtha on their behalf. Since he his district was redrawn to include Fayette County in the 1990s, the local economy has benefited from defense contractors such as BAE Systems.

Some might consider that type of clout indicative of "pork barrel spending," or "congressional earmarks" - two catch phrases commonly tossed about by the anti-Murtha crowd. But one man's "pork barrel" project is another's "worthy cause," and we don't know of too many elected officials - at the local, state or federal level - who don't view bringing home the bacon as a key part of their jobs.

In this area, Murtha excels. It's estimated that he's brought billions of

dollars into his congressional district in a career that dates back to the mid-1970s. In addition to direct federal funding, Murtha has made a priority of having companies establish a local presence in his district.

We see nothing wrong with that. The military's tanks are going to be refurbished somewhere, and its research and development dollars are going to be spent somewhere. Better that they are spent here instead of Virginia, Florida, Texas or California.

In his native Cambria County, Murtha earmarks helped an infantile Concurrent Technologies Corp., a research and development firm that now employs 800 people there, with a \$40 million payroll. Whether that's a good or bad thing depends largely on whether you live and work in the Johnstown area. But if all congressmen could replicate those types of efforts back home, rest assured that the vast majority would.