

MCCONNELL'S EARMARKS

I'm less interested in the local angle on Mitch McConnell's placement of earmarks to benefit BAE in this year's defense appropriations bill than what it says about our military industrial complex.

Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., is pushing \$25 million in earmarked federal funds for a British defense contractor that is under criminal investigation by the U.S. Justice Department and suspected by American diplomats of a "longstanding, widespread pattern of bribery allegations."

McConnell tucked money for three weapons projects for BAE Systems into the defense appropriations bill, which the Senate approved Oct. 3. The Defense Department failed to include the money in its own budget request, which required McConnell to intercede, said BAE spokeswoman Susan Lenover.

Yes, it appears that McConnell expects to get some jobs in Lexington out of this deal, and yes, BAE appears to have donated to the Mitch McConnell polisci fund.

But what interests me is that yet another well-connected defense contractor got a contract that the experts "running" our military said they don't need. No doubt as I speak, Brent Wilkes is testifying that such practices are necessary for the efficient function of business. And no doubt that BAE's execs, if they ever come to be in Wilkes' place (testifying to try to avoid jail time) would say the same thing that Wilkes is saying: that this was necessary work and that it was all a well-intentioned mobilization of the contracting system in DC. I mean, BAE flack Susan Lenover is already pushing that line: the civilians in DOD "failed to include the money in

its own budget request, which required McConnell to intercede." Why is it that the folks in DOD don't know about this requirement, but the Minority Leader does? It sure sounds like it is a political requirement, and not a military one.

See, the point is not that McConnell will get some university program named after him. It's that there continues to be a whole lot of slush laundered through the defense industry; it appears to be the slush that is the product, not the bombers or helicopters or document scanning services. But we have no idea where that slush is going, beyond the re-election of corrupt Republicans (and a few Democrats). Particularly given the profile of the folks involved in the BAE scandal (call me crazy, but anytime I see Maggie Thatcher's sone and Bandar bin Sultan involved in a scheme, I'm more worried about coups in oil-producing countries than I am about graft, regardless of how bad the graft is), it seems pertinent to ask where the slush is going—and why the Minority Leader knows about it, but the military does not.