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Mad Lib Legislation

Radley Balko | August 16, 2010

Good to know that members of Congress continue to give careful, thoughtful consideration to the way they spend our money. Jim Harper explains the strange tale of H.R. 1586.

As we noted here before, this is a “shell bill.” It was introduced as one thing (TARP taxes), became another thing (an aviation bill), and is now a batch of spending policies. (Cost: about \$125 per family)

The most recent version of the bill was produced when the Senate passed a “substitute amendment.” That’s an amendment that clips out everything in the bill and puts in all new text.

In the House and Senate, they often publish amendments ahead of time, and it looks like someone was in a rush to get the amendment together, because they left blank lines where the new name of the bill should have been.

Take a look for yourself. Down toward the bottom of this page in the Congressional Record, it says, “SECTION 1. This Act may be cited as the “_____Act of_____”. (The Library of Congress’ Thomas reporting system picked that up as the “XXXXXXAct ofXXXX,” so that’s how it shows up on our site.)

Well, THAT’s the amendment they brought up and passed, so the new name of the bill is the “_____Act of_____.”

That's right. A hundreds-of-millions-of-dollars spending bill made its way through Congress, and no one even noticed that the damn thing didn't have a name. Which also means you can probably count on one hand the number of lawmakers who actually know what's in the bill—and still have a finger left over to let them know what you think of this nonsense.

(ADDENDUM: Jacob Sullum beat me to this story by a week.)