The Senate approved a bloated state construction program Sunday night amid charges that additions approved by the Senate Revenue and Fiscal Affairs had turned the program into a slush fund. The bill, HB2 by Rep. Steve Theriot, D-Marrero, goes back to the House where representatives will consider the amendments today.

Sen. Jon Johnson, D-New Orleans, said the committee did not have the proper time to consider the bill, having received the bill only a week before it had to reach a decision. He also said that in receiving amendments to the bill, "we have tried to accommodate every member of the Senate." Sen. Randy Ewing, D-Quitman, was critical of the process that resulted in large numbers of local projects added to the bill.

Statelaw requires that highway and other transportation projects must be approved through a priority roads program that includes public hearings and engineering studies on need. Other projects must be reviewed and approved by the joint Capital Outlay Committee of House and Senate members. "How did we get to this procedure (where none of the requirements were followed)?" Ewing said.

Johnsontoldmanyprojects were added because "this is the first year of a new term and many new members are not aware of the process." A lot of amendments were from the administration of Gov. Edwin Edwards, said Johnson, including $70 million for a new public hospital in Rapides Parish.

Sen. John Hainkel, R-New Orleans, asked about specific additions, including purchase of the Caddo Heights Baptist Church in Shreveport, $12 million for a controversial freshwater diversion project and the purchase of a gym that supposedly will be turned into a community center.

Here's how the Senate voted 27-11 for HB2 for the capital outlay program:

FOR the capital outlay program (27) — President Nunez and Sens. Bagneris, Bajoie, Bankston, Barro, Bean, Brinkhaus, Cain, Chabert, Crain, Cravins, Cross, Decius, Fields, Foster, Heitmeier, Hinton, Johnson, Jones, Jordan, Kelly, Morial, Picard, Saunders, Terar, Thompson andullo.

AGAINST the capital outlay program (11) — Sens. Campbell, Dardenne, Ewing, Greene, Hainkel, Hollis, Landry, Lauricella, McPherson, Rayburn and Sevario.

NOT VOTING (1) — Sen. Cox.