



# COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

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**Dave Obey (D-WI), Chairman**

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## **Obey Statement On Earmarks**

“The truth is, this is not serious reform at all. It is a grand-standing attempt to escape the reputation of previous Congresses.”

WASHINGTON – Dave Obey (D-WI), Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, delivered the following speech on the House Floor in response to the most recent empty rhetoric on earmarks.

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“To listen to the last two speakers, one would think that they have Rip Van Winkled their way through the last year in this House. For the Republican Party Leadership to belatedly give us lectures on earmarks is in my view akin to reformed alcoholics giving lectures on temperance.

“The Higher Education bill being debated today is funded through the Labor-Health Appropriations bill. In fiscal 1995, the last year I chaired that subcommittee, that bill contained virtually no earmarks. By the year 2000 that same bill contained 491 earmarks and by 2006 that bill had 3,031 earmarks totaling \$1.2 billion.

“The previous Republican leadership was notorious for using earmarks as enticements in order to get their Membership to vote for bills that individuals would otherwise not be inclined to vote for. For example, newspapers at the time reported that the previous Republican leadership used earmarks in the transportation authorization bill as rewards for several Republican Members who switched their votes and agreed to support the Medicare Part D provision that forbade the Federal Government from negotiating with the drug industry to provide lower costs for seniors under Medicare.

“Under the Republican leadership, the cost of earmarks quadrupled and we were treated to stories about Mr. Cunningham, Mr. Ney, and Mr. Abramoff abusing the process, as well as several others.

“When Democrats took over the House, until we could reform the process, we suspended earmarks for a year over the fierce objections of as many members of the Republican Party as we saw in my own party.

“In response to demands from both parties, after we reformed the process we then resumed the earmarking process with the expressed intention of cutting in half the cost of earmarks in non-project accounts. We made no such commitments for accounts that are by their nature project-based because to do so would gut the very purpose of the bills under consideration. Example, the Army Corps budget is by its nature project-based. In fiscal 2006 the Administration sent up a budget request for the Army Corps containing 984 projects. Of the final amount provided for the Corps, 86 percent of the projects

were Administration requested earmarks. The Corps is an interesting example. The Administration argues that they have a system for selecting projects and that they only select projects that score a 3 or better on their scale. However, in 2006 there were 16 projects requested by the Administration that did not even qualify for funding based on the Administration's own criteria.

“After all the shouting was over last year, we essentially met our promise – cutting non-project earmarks by 43 percent after negotiations with the Senate. Cutting it from \$16 billion down to \$9 billion. So we came pretty doggone close to our goal. I would have preferred a larger reduction to 50 percent, but a 43 percent reduction is a 43 percent larger reduction than any Republican Congress ever produced, and we did it under a reformed process.

“At the beginning of the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress the new Democratic majority passed unprecedented new rules that required the:

- “Listing of the sponsors of every earmark
- “That required that any Member of Congress requesting an earmark disclose in writing the name and address of the intended recipient, the purpose of the earmark, and required that Members certify that he or she had no financial interest in that project.
- “We also required that all matters before a conference committee (including earmarks) must be subjected to full and open debate and that no item might be added to the conference report after the conference committee had adjourned as had happened many times in the past.

“As we moved forward with earmarks last year, I brought a motion to the floor to see if Members wanted to eliminate all earmarks. That motion failed by a vote of 53 to 369, with a majority of both parties voting against it.

“I'm assuming they did that because an overwhelming majority of honorable Members on both sides of the aisle believe that Members should not lose the ability to fund priority items for their districts because of the scurrilous behavior of a handful of renegade Members.

“During House consideration of fiscal 2008 appropriations bills, 71 earmark-related amendments were debated and voted on on the floor, including 3 amendments to eliminate all earmarks from the bill under consideration and 68 amendments to eliminate particular earmarks.

“Of the 48 amendments on which recorded votes were taken, only 13 received the support of more than half the Republicans who voted. On those 13, the percentage of Republicans who voted Yes never exceeded 57 percent.

“Every Member knows that even if the House unilaterally suspends earmarks, the Senate will not follow suit. A firm majority on both sides will see to that.

“I have learned that lesson the hard way.

“One last point – the resolution introduced by our friends on the other side calls for the suspension of earmarks for 6 months until yet another group offers their suggestions for change. It is ironic indeed that that delay would force us to do the same thing that the Republican Leadership so roundly criticized me for last year when I proposed to delay earmarks one month until we had more time to review them.

“The practical effect of the resolution which our Republican friends want to bring up today, even though it is not germane to this bill, would be to require the “airdropping” of every single earmark in the entire federal budget. It would guarantee that no earmarks could be discussed or debated while the bill was on the floor of the House of Representatives.

“It would then give you in spades what our friends on the Republican side said last year that they wanted to avoid. I fail to see how requiring every single appropriations earmark to be airdropped, rather than debated when we consider the bills is reform. It moves exactly in the opposite direction of that which our republican friends said we should move last year.

“So as far as I am concerned, the truth is, this is not serious reform at all. It is a grand-standing attempt to escape the reputation of previous Congresses.

“If I had presided over those previous Congresses, I would be running away from their reputation just as fast as the minority appears to be today.”

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