



# United States Congress

NEWS RELEASE

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## **Earnest Earmarks**

**by Senator Larry Craig and Congressman Mike Simpson**

Recent scandals involving lobbyists and members of Congress cast a new spotlight on the functions of Congress and brought about a flurry of proposals to transform the business of legislating in our nation's capital.

Unfortunately, as you may know, some unscrupulous Members of Congress have used the awarding of appropriations "earmarks" as a means of enriching themselves and their families at the expense of taxpayers. That's wrong, it's against the law, and they will be going to jail for their transgressions.

In order to prevent these abuses from resurfacing, some Members of Congress have called for an end to earmarking or extreme new restrictions on the practice. Earmarking is the simple practice of funding projects or initiatives whose sponsors have petitioned Members of Congress for support. These include projects to renovate hospitals, improve community drinking water systems, create or expand areas of study at colleges and universities, and assist non-profit charitable institutions in their various missions.

As fiscal conservatives, we take our roles on the House and Senate appropriations committees very seriously. We will continue to work to keep federal spending under control, but we acknowledge that not every one of the thousands of Congressional earmarks has been worthy of taxpayer support. However, we believe it is important to consider the consequences of some of these reform proposals and highlight the way in which earmarking has been extremely beneficial to Idahoans.

Some in Congress have proposed eliminating the practice of earmarking completely, saying it encourages corruption and has led to increased federal spending. For several reasons, this is simply not true. Before Congress appropriates one dollar, it passes a Budget Resolution which sets the overall funding amounts for the federal government. Appropriations and earmarking must fit within the overall budget numbers set in the Budget Resolution. A reduction in the amount of federal spending is unlikely without first reducing budget numbers set in the Budget Resolution.

Furthermore, experts disagree whether eliminating earmarks would effectively reduce federal spending. In a recent article on National Review Online, Brian Riedl of the Heritage Foundation says, "Congress could get rid of every pork project tomorrow and it would not cut federal spending directly."

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Why not? Because eliminating earmarks would simply give federal agencies authority over how taxpayer dollars are spent.

Earmarking, by its very nature, shifts discretion over federal dollars away from the federal agencies and puts the funds out on the ground in American communities. Earmarked dollars generally go to projects that are short-term in nature and small in scope. Last year, earmarks we sponsored built new wastewater infrastructure in Bonners Ferry, supported jobs at the Idaho National Laboratory, improved housing for families at Mountain Home Air Force Base, and expanded course offerings at Boise State University. And that is not all.

If federal dollars weren't earmarked for these projects, they would be deposited in the accounts of federal agencies where they would be spent on the growth of the federal government and creation of never-ending programs. When more of their funding is earmarked, the less federal agencies have to grow their bloated bureaucracies.

We have always believed that better decisions are made by local officials. Who would you rather have making decisions about funding for Idaho? Lawmakers who are accountable to you, or some nameless, faceless bureaucrat in Washington, D.C., who has never stepped foot in Idaho? If we abandon the practice of earmarking funding for our home states, those decisions will instead be made, and dollars spent, by tens of thousands of bureaucrats who have no accountability to taxpayers, voters, or anyone else for that matter.

Clearly, eliminating earmarks would shift responsibility for setting federal spending away from Congress to the federal bureaucracies. We believe it would be wrong to do that, but don't take our word for it. Article 1, Section 9, Clause 7 of the Constitution says, "No money shall be drawn from the Treasury but in Consequence of Appropriations made by law." Congress makes the laws.

Put simply, the framers of the Constitution clearly stated that Congress, not the President or federal bureaucrats, should allocate funding for the various functions of the federal government. Ending the practice of earmarking would transfer massive funding authority to the President and the federal agencies in defiance of the Constitution. That is not the way to keep spending in check.

That being said, we realize that change is needed in the appropriations process. But those changes should be the result of a reasoned, well-informed debate, not a knee-jerk desire to defuse controversy and shift attention. We will work toward responsible reforms to ensure that potential for corruption is minimized and taxpayer dollars are spent responsibly, not wasted.