

POSITION PAPER

EARMARKS MUST BE ELIMINATED

By: John W. Wallace

The term "Earmark" is most commonly used to refer to a provision (line-item) in legislation that directs funds to be spent on specific projects. Members of Congress insert earmarks into bills in order to direct specified amounts of money be given or spent on particular organizations or projects in their home states or districts. This differs from the appropriation of budget money to a particular government agency where the agency head can exercise discretion as to where and how the funds are spent. If the funds aren't earmarked by members of congress, the agencies are free to spend money on projects they believe are most appropriate to meet their organizational goals and objectives.

Earmarks can more accurately be described as giving away the taxpayers hard earned money by secretly attaching line-items into non-related congressional bills for specific projects or specific recipients in order to get re-elected.

Many of the beneficiaries of these earmarked funds are state or local public agencies, but just as often, the money goes to private entities where the beneficiaries are political supporters of the legislators pushing the earmarks. Earmarks are the principal means by which Members of Congress "bring home the pork" and publishing their earmarks during an election year is a common tactic used to help incumbent members of congress get reelected.

It is not so much that any single earmark is the problem, but rather it's the entire process. There is no real transparency or accountability in the current system. Members of congress try to re-direct billions of dollars of funding to specific projects within their district without subjecting these projects to debate by their colleagues, or to scrutiny and oversight by the public. The earmarking process invites backroom deals and sometimes unethical, or even corrupt behavior. It has become part of a "pay-to-play" culture where lobbyists, contractors and well-connected individuals give campaign contributions to legislators in return for receiving federal funding via earmarks for their special projects.

While the vital interests of the nation are being ignored by members of both houses of congress regardless of party affiliation, many legislators concentrate their efforts on diverting appropriated agency money to low-priority and sometimes outrageous special interest projects that will generate local publicity and additional campaign contributions.

While the country suffers from an invasion of illegal aliens and cannot seem to find the funds for increased border security, congress earmarks \$3.4 million to research the Formosan Subterranean Termite and \$10 million to La Raza, a pro-illegal alien amnesty organization. While the country goes deeper and deeper into debt and the dollar seems to lose its value every day, congress earmarks \$450,000 for the International Peace Garden in Dunseith, North Dakota and \$13.5 million for the International Fund for Ireland, which includes funding for the World Toilet Summit. While the nation's education system is failing the American people, congress earmarks \$2 million for the Charles B. Rangel Center for Public Service at the City College of New York and another \$200,000 for the Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy in Las Vegas, Nev.

The House of Representatives has recently taken an important first step in reducing earmarks by passing House Rules changes requiring that earmarked spending projects and their congressional sponsors be publicized on the internet at least 48 hours before they are considered for a vote on the floor. Under the new rules, Members of Congress will be required to justify the public need for the specific earmarked expenditures and certify that they won't benefit financially from them. This is a good step forward, but more must be done.

The best way to reduce the number of earmarks is to pass legislation that requires that all bills and legislation be single issue or purposed. An individual bill should address one specific issue and only that issue. Any amendments must directly address that specific issue. *No pork, no side issues, and especially no riders.* All bills must be published and the discussions open to public scrutiny.

Limiting legislation to a single purpose will make bills more concise, and will substantially reduce the number of expensive special interest giveaways that are routinely inserted into so called "must pass" legislation without any debate. If members of congress want to fund specific projects back in their home states, let them introduce bills for these projects and let these bills be openly debated and voted on.

An alternative proposal to the Earmarks process would be to authorize each Senator and Representative to maintain a special fund (\$2,000,000.) to be used to fund local government projects directly from their offices, without being attached to any legislation. The amount would be the same for each Representative or Senator and public disclosure would be required.

For more information about John W. Wallace, or to find out about his positions on other issues, please go to: www.TeaPartyRep.com