



# AMERICANS for TAX REFORM

November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Dear Member of Congress:

**I write in support of reinstating the U.S. House of Representatives' ban on earmarks.** Americans for Tax Reform has long opposed earmarks.

Earmarks are congressional provisions, often within large spending bills, directing funds to be spent on specific projects or programs. Funds are often directed towards specific congressional districts, pressuring members into voting for legislation they wouldn't normally vote for.

**Earmarks are the 'broken windows' of government overspending, the currency of Congressional corruption, and the price of bad votes for more spending. Earmarks are used to buy the votes of congressmen who would never vote for the overall package standing alone, without a bribe.**

Republican House leadership wisely banned earmarks when they won the majority in the House of Representatives in 2010. It would be wise to keep with this precedent in the upcoming 118th Congress. Doing so will demonstrate to voters that Republicans are dedicated to restoring fiscal responsibility in Congress.

Democrats reinstated the use of earmarks just last year. At the time, Democrats repackaged earmarks with the term "Community Project Funding requests" because they recognize just how unpopular this practice is.

According to the Washington Post, [79 percent](#) of Americans said that earmarks are "not acceptable."

This is unsurprising, as earmarks serve one primary purpose: to garner votes for legislation that cannot pass on its own merits. In this way, the practice leads to inadequate law-making and reckless spending.

Earmarks take up a disproportionate amount of members' and their staff's time. Rather than focus on actual legislation, staff time becomes dedicated to inserting earmarks into legislation and meeting with special interests who come with hat-in-hand seeking funding for niche projects.

Further, many of these projects end up as earmarks because they could not receive funding from private institutions nor local/state governments. In many ways, most have not seen any promise in these projects, and thus have not thrown their support behind it. Federal funding is often planners' last-ditch effort to get a project done.

The most infamous [example](#) of an earmark leading to frivolous spending is the "bridge to nowhere." This project began in 2005 after members of Congress from Alaska requested funding to build the Gravina Island Bridge in exchange for their votes.

The bridge was going to connect the town of Ketchikan with a population under 9,000 to the Island of Gravina, an island with an airport and a population of 50. Despite the miniscule number of residents and the availability of a ferry, taxpayers were going to fund the bridge for \$320 million. While Congress put an end to this bridge project in 2015, countless other pork projects have been approved.

722 12<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W.

Fourth Floor

Washington, D.C.

20005

T: (202) 785-0266

F: (202) 785-0261

[www.ATR.org](http://www.ATR.org)

These spending issues grow over time, as legislators become more comfortable with abusing the earmark process.

For example, President Reagan vetoed a highway bill in 1987 because it was loaded with roughly 150 earmarks. By 2005, the transportation bill signed into law contained more than 6,300 earmarks.

Since 1991, according to a CAGW report, there have been 111,417 earmarks costing taxpayers \$375.7 billion. With inflation running rampant, it is imperative that we do everything in our power to rein in wasteful spending.

Earmarks encourage corruption. They caused the downfall of members of Congress such as Pennsylvania Representative Chaka Fattah. CBS Philly reported that earmarks had been used to repay part of an “illegal \$1 million loan from a wealthy friend to prop up his [Fattah’s] failed 2007 campaign for Philadelphia mayor.”

As the Heritage Foundation details, “Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., came under scrutiny when some of the funding that he secured through a \$900,000 earmark for road construction in his district was used to repave the road where he and his daughter both owned homes.”

Additionally, former Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., was involved in a national scandal when he inserted an earmark of \$207 million to create a highway near his own property.

Earmarks provide a pathway for members of Congress to spend money on special interests. This kind of frivolous spending is disrespectful to American taxpayers and a **flagrant violation of Congressional duty to be responsible stewards of taxpayer funds. All lawmakers should support a ban on earmarking.**

Onward,



Grover G. Norquist  
President, Americans for Tax Reform