



washington dc update

Earmarks

February 2, 2011

Read the entire Senate Appropriations Committee release on the earmark moratorium at <http://appropriations.senate.gov/news.cfm?metadata=news.view&id=188dc791-4b0d-459e-b8d9-4ede5ca299e7>

The announcement yesterday by Senate Appropriations Chairman Daniel Inouye that his Committee would not accept earmark requests for the present ends what could have been a serious conflict between the Senate, the House, and the White House. Until yesterday, the Senate seemed adamant that it would be accepting earmark requests for the FY12 budget cycle. House Appropriators have been just as adamant that they would not. This set the stage for dueling Appropriations bills that would have been hard to reconcile in conference and would have faced an uncertain fate at the White House.

But with the decision yesterday, this issue goes away, at least for a time, since Chairman Inouye promised to re-visit the earmark issue next year after the full consequences of the ban are made apparent in the FY12 Appropriations cycle.

We continue to be concerned over this new process that will rely fully upon the decisions of Federal agencies with regard to what projects should be funded with little or no input from individual Members of Congress. We are also concerned over the fact that not a single senior staffer in either the House or the Senate that we have spoken to knows how the Congress will be able to consider authorizations such as WRDA or Title 16 or the Energy and Water Appropriations bill without Member input concerning State or District project priorities. To be fully comfortable with this new process one has to believe that all wisdom on project selection resides with the Executive Branch.

The earmark ban is a bit like being on a sinking ocean liner and noticing a person bailing with a coffee cup. Some might say, "Gee, you really are not going to make a difference in what you are doing," while others might say, "but they are setting such a good example." And both would be correct.

The simplest way to "reform" the earmarking process is to ban any person or group who makes a political donation from receiving an earmark. That would create transparency and help to protect Members from the perception of "earmarking." But it's easier to have a good idea than to make it a reality. For example, one can certainly lose weight by eating only carrot sticks and drinking green tea during next week's Super Bowl. But despite the undeniable benefits, that's pretty tough to do when one is used to eating chicken wings, pizza, chips and dip.

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