

EARMARK ELIMINATION ACT

Frequently Asked Questions

America's debt problems are mounting so rapidly that our fiscal gap increases by roughly \$14 billion every day we wait. That's \$164,000 a second. It's time for Members of Congress to get serious about our deficit and Congress must lead by example.

Over the past several years, Congress has made great strides in reforming the pork barrel earmark process. We must do more. The Earmark Elimination Act, the House companion to the Senate bill introduced by Sen. Pat Toomey (R-PA) and Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO), would permanently eliminate all earmarks. Congress has to take better care of taxpayer dollars by closing the pork barrel buffet once and for all.

What is an "earmark?"

Simply stated, an "earmark" is a directed spending item, limited tax benefit, or limited tariff benefit that is targeted to a specific entity. While in the past, earmarks weren't the source of our debt problem – totaling less than 1% of all federal spending – they had become a source of government corruption and a massive waste of taxpayer dollars. Past earmarks funded Alaska's "Bridge to Nowhere," Iowa's "Indoor Rain Forest," and, "Coconut Road," a Florida highway demanded by an Alaska Congressman for a big contributor.

Why is the Earmark Elimination Act needed?

Currently, there is only a temporary moratorium on earmarks, which expires at the end of the 112th Congress in January 2013. Meanwhile, business as usual continues in Washington as Members of Congress creatively seek out ways to bypass the earmark ban hoping to fund their pet projects.

Americans know their tax dollars are being wasted. The Earmark Elimination Act is an opportunity for Congress to get serious about reform and permanently stop ATM politics.

What has Congress done to reduce earmarks?

In 2007, after taking control of Congress, Democrats introduced new requirements to increase transparency and decrease the number of earmarks. Among other things, this included supplying detailed lists of every earmark and its sponsor, and requiring Members to certify they have no financial interest in any earmark request. In 2009, all Members were required to post their earmark requests and justification online, and the Executive Branch was directed to review all earmark requests. These measures resulted in a 50% decrease in House earmarks from the FY 2006 level. In March 2010, the Democratic Congress banned earmarks for private companies but allowed nonprofits and other public entities to continue to receive Congressionally-directed funds.