

NEWS

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BIPARTISAN COALITION OF LOBBYISTS AND ADVOCATES ANNOUNCES COMMONSENSE EARMARK REFORM PRINCIPLES

(Washington, D.C.) – Today in the nation’s capital, a diverse coalition of good government groups and Washington lobbyists from both sides of the political spectrum held a press conference to announce earmark reform principles aimed at reducing the influence of special interests and saving taxpayers’ money.

“Earmarks are a real problem, but real solutions have been in short supply as politicians have engaged in one-upmanship around the issue. Adopting these commonsense reforms would decrease corruption and increase Americans’ confidence in Congress,” said Melanie Sloan, Executive Director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW).

This confederation of taxpayer watchdogs and private sector lobbyists includes CREW, Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW), Taxpayers for Common Sense (TCS), and Public Citizen (PC). The private-sector lobbyists include former Congressman James Walsh (R-NY) and Manny Rouvelas of K & L Gates; Rich Gold of Holland & Knight; and Dave Wenhold of Miller/Wenhold (all of whom are representing their own views and not those of their firms or clients).

“As a former member of the House Appropriations Committee, I saw both the best and worst of earmarking, I support this effort to make the process more transparent and Members more accountable,” said coalition partner and former Congressman Jim Walsh.

“Whether you are for earmarks or against them, everyone agrees that the public has right to know where their tax dollars are being spent and why,” said Ryan Alexander, President of Taxpayers for Common Sense. “We cannot let the perfect be the enemy of the good; these basic reforms represent a good step forward to more transparent and accountable spending.”

The group announced five earmark reforms that they hope will be embraced as part of a rules package when the 112th Congress convenes in January, 2011.

1. In order to cut the cord between earmarks and campaign contributions, Congress should limit earmarks directed to campaign contributors.
2. To eliminate any connection between legislation and campaign contributions, legislative staff should be barred from participating in fundraising activities.
3. To increase transparency, Congress should create a new database of all congressional earmarks.
4. To ensure taxpayer money has been spent appropriately, the Government Accountability Office should randomly audit earmarks.
5. To promote congressional responsibility without stifling innovation, members of Congress should certify that earmark recipients are qualified to handle the project.

“There have been improvements in accountability and transparency of earmarks since 2006, but much more needs to be done,” said CAGW President Tom Schatz. “These reforms are the least that can be done to provide more timely and comprehensive information to the taxpayers, who are ultimately paying for these projects.”

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