



Earmark Ban To Be Voted On This Week

Among the many controversial debates awaiting congressional newcomers is that of an earmarks ban. This week, both the House and Senate Republican conferences will be voting on whether they should impose a ban on earmarks — special projects to which congressmen appropriate funds in spending bills. The vote will likely be one of many issues that signal a divide between veteran Republicans, establishment Republicans, and those of the Tea Party caucus.



South Carolina Sen. Jim DeMint is one of the leading proponents of the ban. He is joined by Sen. Tom Coburn of Oklahoma. [CNN](#) reports:

A rules change pitched by DeMint and Coburn is scheduled to be voted on Tuesday by the Republican Senate Conference. The non-binding rules change calls on all GOP senators to unilaterally ban earmarks for the next two years. The ban would not affect Democratic senators to add spending measures to future bills.

On Friday, Rep. John Boehner announced that he will hold the GOP conference to vote on the earmark ban, a proposal outlined in the “Pledge of America.”

Mitt Romney, former presidential candidate and governor of Massachusetts, announced his support of the earmarks ban in an email:

Senator DeMint is courageously standing on conviction with his much-needed proposal to ban earmarks, which will curb wasteful spending and restore accountability to the way Congress spends taxpayer dollars.

We all need to recognize that Washington can't responsibly begin to address out-of-control debt and deficits until the practice of cramming earmarks into spending bills is stopped. While earmarks are not the only cause of our budget problems, they have come to symbolize what's wrong with Washington.

Romney has declared his intent to launch an online petition through “Free and Strong America PAC” to support the ban.

The Republicans found a surprising ally in President Obama, who, in an Internet and radio address, advised:

As we work to reform our budget, Congress should also put some skin in the game. I agree with those Republican and Democratic members of Congress who've recently said that in these challenging days, we can't afford what are called earmarks.

According to [ABC News](#), “Earmarks have long been favored by members of both parties, with members of the House and Senate appropriations committees particularly keen on preserving congressional



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power to direct money to favored causes.”

A limited portion of congressional appropriations is earmarked. Yet, while earmarks generally have a minor impact on overall spending, the proposed ban is said to be a symbolic act, as it allegedly represents a change in White House dealings.

Despite what symbolic impact the ban may have, it has not acquired the support of all Republicans. For example, though Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky originally contended that earmarks are an appropriate use of legislative authority which allots powers to the legislative branch that would otherwise be in the complete control of the executive branch, CNN has reported that he may have changed his mind on the ban:

DeMint’s move had been opposed by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, as well as other Senate Republicans, but McConnell changed his position Monday potentially indicating a sea-change on the topic.

And, just before this report was posted online, [AP released a report](#) stating that McConnell had just "reversed course and endorsed a moratorium on pork-barrel projects known as ‘earmarks.’ " The report noted:

"Nearly every day that the Senate’s been in session for the past two years, I have come down to this spot and said that Democrats are ignoring the wishes of the American people," McConnell said in a surprise announcement in a Senate floor speech. "When it comes to earmarks, I won’t be guilty of the same thing."

While earmarks tend to be designated for wasteful and unconstitutional spending, critics of the earmark ban have articulated concerns that the ban’s symbolic nature may discourage real progress in the realm of fiscal conservatism. As noted by [The New American](#), for example, there were no earmarks in the \$787 billion “stimulus” plan, or in the additional \$350 billion in TARP funding. However, that is not to say that the absence of earmarks in these bills made them any less wasteful, excessive, or unconstitutional.

Additionally, opponents of the earmark ban, such as Congressman Ron Paul, recognize that the absence of earmarks allots more financial control to the executive branch.

Paul elaborates:

Congress is reneging on our responsibilities [when it does not earmark] because it is the responsibility of the Congress to earmark. That’s our job. We’re supposed to tell the people how we’re spending the money, not to just deliver it in a lump sum to the executive branch and let them deal with it. And then it’s dealt with behind the scenes.

Actually, if you voted against all the earmarks, there would be less transparency. Earmarks really allow transparency, and we know exactly where the money is being spent.

In 2009, *The New American* observed,

The presence of absence of earmarks in legislation does not determine whether the money is spent; but the presence or absence of earmarks does determine how much control the Congress exercises over the spending compared to that of the executive branch.

The greater focus, according to the opponents of the earmark ban, is overall spending.

In the meantime, the earmark ban is expected to divide Republicans, something to which the White



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House is likely unopposed.

ABC News notes,

It will be the first of several areas where the president seeks out ways to build unusual coalitions inside Congress that peel some Republicans off from their leadership.

Photo: In this Nov. 3, 2010 file photo, House Republican leader John Boehner of Ohio, right, and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Ky., left, swap positions at the microphones during a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington: AP Images



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