

Why we secretly love earmarks

by Roland_S_Martin

At Texas A&M University's sporting events, whenever opposing coaches go off on the referees, our yell leaders "we don't have cheerleaders" signal for the fans to do one of our yells, which ends with, "Sit down, bus driver!"

As I watched Sen. John McCain stand up and go on one of his rants about earmarks, I wanted to shout, "Sit down, bus driver!"

Look, I like Sen. McCain, and to be honest, I agree with him 100 percent that Congress shouldn't be spending billions of dollars on pet projects, but I'm also realistic; no one truly cares.

Really, no one cares. Sure, there are a few folks in Congress who rail against earmarks. And there are outside pressure groups that are trying to rally the American people to voice their outrage about the process, but I firmly believe that the folks at home love to send their members of Congress to bring the bacon back home.

Yeah, bacon. That comes from a pig. It's pork, i.e., pork-barrel spending. That spending comes from earmarks.

That, folks, is the real deal. Someone in Texas right now is crying and complaining about the earmarks put in place by a congressman from Pennsylvania, but that someone doesn't care a lick about the money that he is getting. And that congressman in Pennsylvania is ripping into a member of Congress from Georgia for requesting earmarks, but you better not touch his! And that's how it works in Congress. Democrats love earmarks. Republicans love earmarks. Liberals don't have a problem with them. And conservatives may talk fiscal responsibility, but earmarks are OK, as long as those earmark checks come their way.

This is the system that we have set up and lived by, and no one "and I mean no one" is willing to change the process. The spending bill before Congress contains about 9,000 earmarks, which account for only a tiny fraction of the bill's total cost. That's under a Democratic president. In 2006, a Republican budget had 12,000 earmarks.

In fact, McCain put forth a bill to get rid of the \$7.7 billion in earmarks, but guess what? It got just 32 votes in the Senate. That means that even a few of his fellow Republicans went along with the Democrats. See, if it were that big of a deal, they would have said no.

McCain can crow all day, and President Obama can implore Congress to slow down the earmarks, but the response by big-time Democrat Steny Hoyer speaks volumes about whether we will see earmark reform: "I don't think the White House has the ability to tell us what to do," said the House majority leader.

The only way we truly will see Congress get its act together is if you — the voters — actually stand up and say, "Enough is enough!"

First, send the money back. If people truly were outraged about the abuses in Congress, they would say no to the money. We are hearing various governors say they will refuse some stimulus money because it has too many strings attached. OK, show me a bunch of voters who march on the offices of their members of Congress and say, "Send it back."

Don't hold your breath.

Second, when your congressman comes to your community association, church or business group looking for an endorsement, ask him to commit on the spot to ask for no earmarks as a condition for your support. And then have him sign a pledge showing that he accepted.

Third, if the congressman refuses to agree to end all earmarks, then demand that he publish in his district's newsletter and on his Web site all earmarks requested and approved.

Folks, if you truly want to see Congress clean up its act, you're going to have to make its members do it. And the only thing you have that they want is your vote. So leverage it. Otherwise, shut up about earmarks, because it's just wasted breath.

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