

## Conservative Action Project

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The Conservative Action Project (CAP), founded in 2008 by many conservative leaders with former **Attorney General Edwin Meese III** serving as the Founding Chairman. CAP is currently chaired by **The Honorable Becky Norton Dunlop** and is designed to facilitate conservative leaders working together on behalf of common goals. Participants include the CEOs of over 100 organizations representing all major elements of the conservative movement-economic, social and national security.

### Memo for the Movement

#### ***Stop the Return of Earmarks!***

January 26, 2017  
Washington, DC

We congratulate the Senate Republican Conference for its vote on January 10<sup>th</sup> to keep the ban on earmarks. Sadly, some House Republicans still want to bring back earmarks in appropriations bills and thus bring back the old ways of Washington. It's hard to think of a single practice in the political arena that better represents the "swamp" of Washington than earmarking. Earmarks are cronyism in its purest form and erode Americans' faith in their elected officials and system of representative government. **We urge the House to follow the Senate's lead and also maintain its ban on earmarks.**

Some Americans may know just how the practice works, and how bad it is: a politically connected donor to a congressman, or perhaps a local political leader on whom the congressman relies for support, requests federal taxpayer money for a particular project in the congressman's district. The congressman then makes the earmark request, not because he has explored all other projects in the nation and concluded that the one in his district is miraculously the worthiest, but primarily because it will bring political benefit to him and those people or groups who support (or could potentially support) him, both financially and electorally.

Most commonly, earmark requests are granted based on political seniority and/or electoral vulnerability, rather than on any degree of merit. It's an unscrupulous practice, and Congress was right to stop it. In fact, Vice-President-Elect Pence was instrumental in stopping earmarks during his time in Congress.

Earmarks are often used to "grease the skids" for higher federal spending. That is, the Appropriations Committees and the leaders in both houses of Congress insert earmarks into big-spending bills in order to entice particular Members of Congress to vote for bills they might otherwise not vote for. The leaders deliberately put Members into the difficult position of choosing between fiscal responsibility and special projects for their constituents. Furthermore, and worse, many earmarks are for wasteful or unconstitutional projects, e.g., local matters that should not receive federal taxpayer dollars at all. For example, federal taxpayers in Indiana should not have to pay for the repair of a local one-lane overpass in California, nor should federal taxpayers in North Carolina have to pay for bike-path beautification in New Mexico.

The use of all taxpayer funds should be considered on the merits through regular order, first through congressional authorizing committees in open sessions, then through congressional appropriations committees in open sessions, and then on the floors of both houses of Congress

with significant advance public notice and the ability to amend or eliminate any such spending. And once such spending is enacted, Congress should conduct rigorous oversight to ensure that there is no improper use of the funds. Congress has much to do if it is to regain control over the wasteful spending by executive branch agencies, and that should be its primary goal, rather than self-serving, politically directed spending of the American taxpayers' hard-earned dollars.

We suggest the following steps for the House of Representatives to stop a return to congressional earmarking:

- **No Special Meeting.** Press reports indicate that House Republicans intend to hold a special meeting by March of this year to discuss how earmarks could be “reformed” and thus returned to practice. House Republican Leadership should call off this meeting and declare that the earmark ban will remain in force.
- **Accept a Transparency Challenge.** Even the Members of Congress who want to bring back earmarks know that the issue is politically risky. That is why the meetings to discuss bringing them back have been secret and why the planned future meeting will be secret. If House Republicans feel they must proceed with their special meeting on earmarks, then House Republican Leadership should ensure that the meeting is publicly announced at least a week in advance and is covered live on TV and Internet video stream. In fact, House Republicans should hold all deliberations about a return to earmarking in public and on TV/livestream—and cast any related votes in the same public way.

If these efforts above fail, we would then urge President Trump to veto any bill that (a) contains earmarks, (b) refers to an external list of earmarks (i.e., a list of projects not included in the legislative text), or (c) is or is expected to be accompanied by an external list of earmarks not in the legislative text.

We look forward to Conservative-Movement-wide collaboration on this important matter.

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