



January 29, 2018

Key Vote on the DeSantis-Budd Letter Urging a Public Vote on Reinstating Earmarks

On behalf of our activist community, I urge you to contact your representative and ask him or her to sign the letter led by Reps. Ron DeSantis (R-Fla.) and Ted Budd (R-N.C.) to Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) and House Republican Conference Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-Wash.) urging that any vote to bring back the pernicious practice of earmarks be public. FreedomWorks will key vote the signers of the letter, treating them as voting YES for the purposes of our 2018 Congressional Scorecard.

Clearly, many have failed to learn from the lessons of the past. Earmarks were symbolic of corruption and wasteful spending in appropriations bills and major legislation. According to Citizens Against Government Waste, the number of earmarks grew from 1,439 at cost of \$10.778 billion in 1995 to nearly 14,000 at a cost of \$27.82 billion in 2005. In 2006, the cost eclipsed \$29 billion.

There's no denying that earmarks breed corruption. Jack Abramoff, a lobbyist who served time in federal prison for corruption related to earmarks, called the appropriations committee a "favor factory." Rep. Duke Cunningham (R-Calif.) served prison time for his own earmark scandal. A 2012 Washington Post report noted that nearly three dozen lawmakers had "directed more than \$300 million in earmarks and other spending provisions to dozens of public projects that are next to or within about two miles of the lawmakers' own property."

Although purported "reforms" were put in place to provide greater transparency, earmarks remained part of the status quo in Congress. In 2010, House and Senate Republicans announced that they had included a moratorium on earmarks in their respective conference rules. As then-Rep. Mike Pence (R-Ind.) said at the time, "House Republicans are going to the American people and saying we want a clean break from the runaway spending in the past. And that's going to be quite a contrast from this Congress and the administration."

Some House Republicans want to bring back earmarks for only limited purposes. That won't last long, and earmarks will gradually be fully reinstated as members look for more ways to fund

their pet pork-barrel projects. Sadly, this is the desired end for some House Republicans.

Earmarks may not have represented a significant amount of federal outlays, but there were, as former Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) called them, “the gateway drug to Washington’s spending addiction.” Over the next ten years, the budget deficit is projected to rise from \$563 billion in 2018 to \$1.463 trillion in 2027. The percentage of the debt held by the public will rise from 78 percent to 91.2 percent. Past the ten-year budget window, the finances of the United States grow worse.

If House Republicans can’t manage to keep themselves from bringing back earmarks, how can we ever trust them to tackle the drivers of budget deficits and debt?

Should the House Republican Conference move forward on the tone-deaf notion of reinstating earmarks, there must be a public and transparent process, including a recorded vote. The American public has a right to know which members are voting to reopen the favor factory by bringing back this currency of corruption.

FreedomWorks will count the signatures on the DeSantis-Budd letter on our 2018 Congressional Scorecard. Signatures will be treated as YES votes. The scorecard is used to determine eligibility for the FreedomFighter Award, which recognizes Members of the House and Senate who consistently vote to support economic freedom and individual liberty.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Brandon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Adam Brandon
President, FreedomWorks