

NEWS from the T&I DEMOCRATS

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Democratic Caucus

U.S. House of Representatives, 2163 Rayburn HOB, Washington, DC 20515

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Oberstar Praises Vote on ARC Earmarks *House turns back bill lacking earmark protection*

WASHINGTON—The House today rejected an effort to pass a reauthorization bill for the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) because the bill did not protect states' allocations from being reduced by Congressional earmarks.

The ARC directs economic development grants to states in the Appalachian region according to a formula that provides for fair distribution. The House version of the bill contained language that requires any Congressional earmarks to be deducted from a beneficiary state's allocation under the formula. However, today the House voted on the Senate version, which contains no such protections. If enacted, the bill would have allowed states receiving Congressional earmarks to get the earmarked funds at the expense of the other states in the region.

Rep. James L. Oberstar, Ranking Democrat on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, led the fight against the Senate bill, even though he has long supported ARC.

"Before the creation of the Appalachian Regional Commission, the only way up for the people of this region was a bus ticket north, to Detroit, or Chicago, or Cleveland," Oberstar said during debate on the House Floor. "Over the years, the ARC's investments have taken this region from 45 percent of the national per capital income, and boosted it up to 75 percent. That's an extraordinary accomplishment."

However, in this instance, Oberstar found himself in the unprecedented position of opposing the ARC authorization. He pointed out that earmarks favor those states with clout on the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, while other states see their allocations reduced.

He said the bill was brought up under rules of debate that would not permit an amendment to insert the earmark protection language from the House version of the bill.

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“We don’t have an opportunity to reinstate the House language, to stand up for the House position,” Oberstar said. “That is why I come with a heavy heart to oppose this bill.”

The bill was brought up under suspension of the rules, an expedited procedure used primarily for noncontroversial legislation. The suspension process limits debate and prohibits amendments, but requires a two-thirds majority for passage. Today’s vote was 215-204, well short of the necessary two-thirds.

“I urge the House Republican leadership to immediately schedule an ARC reauthorization bill that contains the bipartisan, anti-earmarking provision,” Oberstar said. “It is the right thing to do for the people of Appalachia.”

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