

Earmarks are, in essence, Congressional appropriations upon the request of individual Members with little or no evaluation by other Members through the normal appropriation process. For the most part, the funds used for earmarks are funds that would have been spent anyway. And many or most of the earmarked funds would have been spent on the same projects, but not all of them. For example, if a portion of appropriated transportation funds coming to Georgia were not earmarked, then the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) would decide how to spend that money. GDOT members, most of them former politicians, might elect to support the same projects a Member of Congress might support with earmarks. But leaving it up to individual Members invites abuse, even fraud. That's what leads to so many silly, wasteful projects. The "bridge to nowhere" comes to mind. So I would certainly change the earmarks process as we know it.

In fact, I've voted to end them once and for all, but this effort was unsuccessful. So until we end them for good, I want to ensure a greater level of transparency to help prevent the pork-related scandals we recently endured. A bill I introduced in January 2008 (H.Res. 920) was designed to help solve the disclosure problem by closing two earmark loopholes. The spirit of this bill was incorporated into the new "rules package" governing the House during the 111th Congress. This doesn't completely stop wasteful earmarks, but it will give us a chance to find them and identify those who offer them.

With regard to earmarks I have requested, I follow a process designed to assure they are not wasteful or abusive. I typically work with local governments, civic organizations, business development groups or our military to identify what makes sense. This process generates requests to me for earmarks. I cull some that seem inappropriate for one reason or another and then forward all of the rest to the Appropriations Committee. I also list each request on my website. Staffers on the Appropriations Committee then work with my staff to vet the requests to further assess their appropriateness. Often times I receive additional information after the submission deadline which affects how I or the committee views the requests. Typically, only a small portion of the requests I forward to the Appropriations Committee actually receive funding. Each of the successful applicants is listed in the publicly-available committee report along with a note that I requested the funds. It is not unusual to see successful requests with multiple Congressional supporters, particularly if the President or the military or National Institutes of Health (NIH) or some similar institution is the requesting party.