

House Vows To Tackle Earmark Reform as Backlash From Activists Grows

By Gail Russell Chaddock
The Christian Science Monitor
 House Republican leaders promise that even if lobby reform stalls - as it has - they will do something to rein in earmarks when they return to Capitol Hill next month.

The reason: There's too much flak over lawmakers who are cashing in on earmarks - legally, as campaign contributions; illegally, as bribes. Even good projects look bad when they're muscled into spending bills late in the process, anonymously, and with no competition, debate, or chance to delete them.

Despite ongoing corruption scandals, many members still find pet projects to be a political asset. Come time to craft a stump speech, incumbents can point to that new museum, hospital wing, or highway connector as proof that they are making a difference in Washington.

As a result, promised reforms don't get off the ground. Earmark reform is included in both House and Senate lobby bills, but negoti-

ations over a final version have gridlocked. One bipartisan proposal to put all government spending, including earmarks and contracts, onto a public database was blocked this month by a senator, who is allowed by Senate rules to remain anonymous.

But a new network of think tanks, advocacy groups, and bloggers is taking up the cause. The aim: To shine enough light on the process to turn earmarks into a net political liability.

"With earmarks, you're short-circuiting the kind of open and robust debate you need on what our priorities should be ... and a system with some kind of vetting and processing," says Bill Allison, senior fellow at the Sunlight Foundation, a group founded in January on former Justice Brandeis's statement that "sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants."

The process of earmarking pre-empted the question: "Is there someone else out there who could do the whole thing better?" he adds.

Two weeks ago, the Sunlight

Foundation, a coalition of interest groups opposed to earmarks, released a spreadsheet of 1,811 earmarks pending in the fiscal year 2007 Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations bill. If you knew where to look, you could find a list of earmarks on a government Web site. But it leaves out what reformers say is the key fact about any earmark: who sponsored it.

"Once you know who the member is, you can start asking questions such as: Is there a direct financial connection with a member of the board of directors who is a [campaign] donor? How was this hospital or training program chosen over another? Sometimes it's because it's the best program; sometimes it's because there's a lobbyist who is paid," says Zephyr Teachout, national director of the Sunlight Foundation. "We hope to turn K Street upside down."

Activists run across the political spectrum, including Ms. Teachout, who directed Howard Dean's online campaign, and conservative-leaning organizations, such as the Club for Growth, Human Events Online, the National Taxpayers Union, and the Heritage Foundation. Other participants include the Washington Examiner, the blog Porkbusters.org, and Citizens Against Government Waste, a public-interest group.

Since the Senate recessed before a vote on this bill, this month is a rare opportunity for members and the public to scrutinize earmarks. The coalition says that interest is already building on other blogs, and they expect to

produce a report in a few weeks - probably in time for a Senate debate on the bill.

"This is not just for [political] obsessives," says Teachout. "It's for someone who spent time on their local school board and wants to get involved in national politics and has three hours a week or the guy who has 10 minutes. We're providing a service for the tens of thousands of citizens who really care about this and giving them tools to be more powerful in getting Congress to make some changes."

In a few cases, such as \$3 million for the Charles B. Rangel Center for Public Service at City College of New York, the earmark's sponsor is obvious. (Representative Rangel of New York is the ranking Democrat on the House Ways and Means Committee.) But the majority of earmarks are anonymous and added late in the process. Even members don't know earmark sponsors.

Last year, Sen. Arlen Specter (R) of Pennsylvania, who chairs the Labor, Health and Human Services panel of the Senate Appropriations Committee, blocked nearly all earmarks in the FY 2006 appropriations bill, citing the emergency needs caused by hurricane Katrina.

When Republicans took over the House in 1995, there were five earmarks in the Labor, Health and Human Services bill, amounting to \$2.4 million. By FY 2005, the number of earmarks attached to this bill had soared to 3,014 or \$1.18 billion.

But this year, the committee is proposing 1,811 earmarks. Many more are often added when House and Senate conferees meet on a final version of spending bills. In a year when many spending bills are rolled into one omnibus spending bill - as is expected after elections this fall - earmarks typically soar.

Currently, the House's lobby reform bill requires disclosure of the names of lawmakers requesting earmarks and creates a process

to challenge individual earmarks on the floor.

Should negotiations between the House and Senate over lobby reform remain in limbo, House Republicans say they will "immediately adopt and implement a comprehensive earmark reform rules change."

The White House is also pushing for Senate adoption of a line item veto, which passed the House June 22. "It is a way to cut out unnecessary and wasteful spending," says Rob Portman, Office of Management and Budget director, who says he is "still guardedly

optimistic" that the bill can pass the Senate.

Senate reformers say the key to passing these measures is a more public discussion of the cost of earmarks. "We want to get the public more educated," says John Hart, a spokesman for Sen. Tom Coburn (R) of Oklahoma. "If they're educated, they will be profoundly angry and dedicated to electing people who will change the rules of the game."

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Playground Is Nearing Completion

By Paul Gingras

Brevort Township Supervisor Ed Serwach tested the slide contributed by trustees to the new playground, and gave his official nod of approval at the township meeting Tuesday, August 1.

"I encourage you all to give it a slide," he told the board.

The playground is next to the Community Center in Moran and the slide is one piece of a project funded by the township, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Harold and Sally Kriesche of Deer Ranch, and Farmers Insurance in St. Ignace, and assembled by a team of volunteers over the summer.

The project was coordinated by Township Clerk Susan Stelzer, who said the project is nearly complete. The next step, she said, is to finish sectioning off the playground from the community center parking lot with brightly painted metal, horseshoe-shaped barriers around the perimeter and boulders between them.

The boulders and the installa-

tion of two more benches will complete the project, and to celebrate, Township Treasurer Dan Litzner and Mrs. Stelzer organized a community picnic for Saturday, August 26.

"This has been an exceptional project," Mrs. Stelzer said, noting the contributions of volunteers, businesses, and local organizations.

Contributors and volunteers include Wade Huskey, Greg and Diana Peterson, Chuck Litzner, Mark Butkovich, Luci Wallace, Mark and Wayne Peterson, Jim West, Ryan Bird, Don Luger, Roxanne Powers Tallman, Justna Hershman, Alfred Hershman, Wilma Hershman, Tracey McCluskey, Katie and Heather Stelzer, Straits Building Center, Do It Center, and local bakers who provided goods for the bake sale at the Moran Mud Run in July.

"It amazes me that so many people from all over the county helped," Mrs. Stelzer said. "A lot of these contributors are not from our township."

Health Benefit Counselors Needed

The Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program (MMAP), a free health benefits counseling service, is seeking volunteers to learn about and teach older adults about health benefits.

The Michigan MMAP assists senior citizens who have problems with or questions about Medicare, Medicaid, Medicare supplemental insurance, long term care insurance, or related issues.

Volunteer counselors are trained and certified, and must be willing to commit at least one year of service and serve 10 hours per month. They also must attend refresher training sessions three to four times a year.

Counselor training is now being scheduled for October.

Information about becoming a MMAP volunteer counselor can be obtained by calling Sherry Whitman, Upper Peninsula MMAP Coordinator, at (800) 338-7227.

NOTICE FOR BIDS

Mackinac County Courthouse Window Replacement Proposals

The Mackinac County Board of Commissioners is seeking bid proposals to replace windows in the Courthouse Building. Information can be obtained by contacting Mary Kay Tamlyn, Mackinac County Clerk, 100 S. Marley Street, St. Ignace, MI 49781.

Mary Kay Tamlyn
 County Clerk
 906-643-7300

STATE OF MICHIGAN PUBLIC NOTICE OF PROPOSED DIRECT LEASING OF NONMETALLIC MINERALS (SAND AND GRAVEL) NONMETALLIC NOMINATION 2006-8

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) proposes to lease State-owned nonmetallic mineral (sand and gravel) rights. This parcel is an existing State sand and gravel pit being converted from a mineral permit to a mineral lease in an effort to improve management and reclamation. The land under consideration for leasing is located in the following area:

SE1/4 SE1/4, Section 5 T42N, R01E, Clark Township, Mackinac County, 40 acres more or less, "Winberg Road Gravel Pit"

Written comments by interested parties relative to the leasing of this description should be submitted to the DNR, Forest, Mineral, and Fire Management, P.O. Box 30452, Lansing, Michigan 48909-7952, or via e-mail to espinosl@michigan.gov. Comments must be received NO LATER THAN October 2, 2006.

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MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION PUBLIC NOTICE HERBICIDE PROGRAM

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) hereby provides notice to the public and to property owners adjacent to state highways, of the 2006 Herbicide Application Program for roadside rights-of-way within the counties listed below. All applications will take place between August 28, 2006 and October 27, 2006.

Brush Mowing/Herbicide Application
 Location- On state trunk lines (US and M Routes) within Chippewa and Mackinac counties, where MDOT determines treatment is needed.

County/Route where the applications will occur:

Chippewa Co. - M-123 from Mackinac Co. Line to M-28

Mackinac Co. - M-123 from I-75 to Chippewa Co. Line

Treatments will be made for control of light brush in turf areas along the roadsides. Herbicides will generally be applied to areas not routinely maintained by adjacent property owners. All applications will be applied directly to the surface of the cut stems by spray nozzles located beneath the tractor mounted brush cutting deck.

The following herbicide mixture will be utilized for the brush spray application.

Dow AgroSciences Garlon 3A or Garlon 4 (Triclopyr) and Vista (Fluroxypyr 1-methylheptyl ester).

Spot Brush Spray Application
 Location- On M-35 from the Marquette County Line south to Perkins in Delta County, where MDOT determines treatment is needed.

Treatments will be made for control of woody tree/brush species within clear vision areas and clear zones. Herbicides will generally be applied to areas not routinely maintained by adjacent property owners. All applications will be foliar applied by hand gun equipment.

The following herbicide mixture will be utilized for the brush spray application.

Dow AgroSciences Garlon 3A and Vista (Fluroxypyr 1-methylheptyl ester) or DuPont Escort XP (Metsulfuron methyl).

Do not enter any of the treated areas until the spray has dried.

All applications will be made by personnel certified by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and employed by the Michigan Department of Transportation. For further information regarding these applications, contact:

Ray Roberts, Associate Region Engineer for Operations
 Michigan Department of Transportation
 1818 Third Avenue North
 Escanaba, MI 49829
 Phone: 888-414-6368

This notice is published per Regulation 637 of Michigan's Act 171, Public Acts of 1976, as Amended.