

# Improving Congressional Spending Habits

*James C. Capretta*



HUDSON INSTITUTE



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# *Executive Summary*

When voters turned to new leadership in the 2006 midterm elections, a key reason was displeasure with the way Congress was handling the taxpayers' money. A steady drumbeat of news stories documenting excessive and wasteful spending, as well as outright corruption, contributed to the growing sense that the Republican Congress had abandoned its conservative fiscal principles to stay in power. Experts and the general public alike now view the congressional spending process as lacking in basic integrity.

One reason for this distrust is the shadowy practice of earmarking, which rose last year to appalling levels. Earmarking enables lawmakers to designate funds for specific projects (and constituencies) rather than allocate funds to an agency for use at its discretion; it often takes place at the last minute and behind closed doors. Perhaps the most notorious earmark of all time was the infamous “bridge to nowhere,” inserted in the 2005 transportation authorization bill, which would have connected a tiny Alaskan village to an even tinier Alaskan island—at a cost of \$223 million to American taxpayers.

Also contributing to voter distrust and displeasure is Congress's funding of programs without regard to efficiency and results. Whereas most private-sector businesses have had to improve productivity and eliminate unnecessary management layers in order to remain competitive in the global marketplace, the federal government continues to fund agencies without regard to performance. Congress simply passes the bill for these wasteful programs on to the American public.

The cost of congressional spending abuses is not to be measured simply in dollars. Earmarking and wasteful spending by Congress harm the very foundation of American democracy and civic life. By undermining trust in Congress as an institution, these practices leave voters cynical and distrustful of government. But they can be curtailed. A new approach to congressional

spending reform—simple transparency based on reporting of funding decisions and other relevant data on the Internet—empowers ordinary citizens to oversee how elected officials spend taxpayers’ money and has already proved successful.

## **EARMARKING.**

Earmarking, once considered a mere nuisance, has grown to unacceptable proportions. Between FY 1995 and FY 2006, the group Citizens Against Government Waste finds, the total number of appropriations earmarks increased from 1,439 to 9,963—a staggering 600 percent increase. According to the Congressional Research Service, earmarking escalated dramatically in nearly every major appropriations measure between 1994 and 2005. The 1994 Defense Department appropriations bill, for example, had 587 earmarks; the 2005 bill had 2,506.

The iron law of political math—concentrated benefits outweigh diffuse costs—makes earmarking particularly difficult to curb. Beneficiaries of an earmark—generally a small number of constituents—tend to be grateful and vocal, while the millions of taxpayers nationwide who each pay a small cost are acquiescent. And because so many members are themselves seeking earmarks, they cannot credibly oppose earmarks from one of their colleagues.

Congressmen may tell themselves that earmarking is somehow less “bureaucratic” than ordinary budgeting procedures, that it allows congress to respond directly to the electorate’s wishes. But this argument ignores the very real threat posed by earmarking to democracy and public trust in government:

*Earmarking undermines an appropriate understanding of the federal role under the Constitution. Congress’s authority to spend taxpayer funds is not unlimited, but rather granted only for national purposes.*

*Earmarking contributes to the problem of “invisible” government. The practice of last-minute, closed-door earmarking is the norm, not the exception. Earmarks are routinely inserted in conference, shortly before a bill is sent to the president for signature.*

*Competition and grant-making rules protect taxpayers and ensure integrity.* Earmarking bypasses the normal process for allocation of program funds, which is designed to foster competition, fairness, and integrity in funding of grantees.

*Innocent earmarking is a short step from corruption.* Once Congress directly funds specific budgetary items, those seeking funds for inappropriate purposes—such as their own personal enrichment—will gravitate to Congress.

*Earmarking diverts staff and member time and attention from more important national issues.* Processing earmark requests has become a large part of the Appropriations Committee workload, to the detriment of genuine national priorities.

## **WASTEFUL AND INEFFICIENT SPENDING.**

As significant a problem as earmarking is, it is by no means the most serious problem related to congressional spending. Congress continues to create and fund new programs without any clear expectation for program performance or results. Government agencies and programs can operate for many years without ever facing any questions regarding their performance. They have no incentive to improve because, in the end, they get their taxpayer-financed budget regardless of how well they have performed.

This waste and inefficiency are unacceptable. There is no reason that private-sector strategies to reward performance should not be more broadly adopted by government. An agency could be required to link every budget dollar requested from the legislature to a particular measurable outcome. The performance of the agency in achieving the outcome becomes a significant tool for accountability and a central focus in budgetary decision making. With budget and performance integration, legislators can tell taxpayers what they will get for their money.

There is reason to be optimistic that a program launched by President Bush in 2001—the President’s Management Agenda—may manage to curtail wasteful spending. Among the program’s strengths is a systematic and comprehensive measurement instrument for program performance across

all agencies of the federal government: the Performance Assessment Rating Tool, or PART. A new website, ExpectMore.gov, provides detailed PART results for every program that has had a PART evaluation.

But, of course, the most promising approaches to spending reform can be thwarted by an uncooperative Congress. To date, Congress's reaction to executive branch performance initiatives ranges from indifference to hostility. Clearly, Congress has not bought into the performance budgeting effort.

## **POLICING CONGRESS WITH INTERNET-BASED TRANSPARENCY.**

There is recourse for voters, however. A new approach to reform is proving successful, one that empowers ordinary citizens and that involves simple transparency based on reporting of funding decisions and other relevant data on the Internet.

The power of the Internet became apparent when the 2005 transportation authorization bill took the process of earmarking to a level not seen before. The bill contained over five thousand earmarks, including the now-notorious "bridge to nowhere." That earmark was widely criticized by the media, watchdog groups, and think tanks, but it was the new Internet-based news culture that really drove the grassroots opposition to it. Blogs and associated websites provided up-to-the-minute information on the project's status; and an Internet-connected electorate bombarded Senate offices with e-mails calling for the project to be terminated. In November 2005, the House and Senate passed a measure killing the earmark. Those bearing the "diffuse costs" of earmarking had at last successfully defeated a project.

The Internet was also the basis of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, or FFATA. Designed to increase the transparency of government spending, the bill requires OMB to establish by January 2008 a new, publicly accessible, online database disclosing the recipients of any federal funding in excess of \$25,000.

Fittingly, it was the Internet that defeated opposition to this bill in the Senate. When an anonymous opponent kept the bill off the floor for a vote, bloggers systematically campaigned to expose and defeat the holds on the bill, urging concerned citizens to contact their senators and ask that they affirm on the record that they were not responsible for keeping it in limbo.

Once the bill's opponents had been identified—they were Robert Byrd (D-WV) and Ted Stevens, (R-AK)—the Senate was barraged with requests for Byrd and Stevens to drop their holds. They finally did so, and in September 2006, President Bush signed the bill into law.

The new online tools that allow ordinary citizens to monitor congressional spending—the FFATA database and ExpectMore.gov—represent a substantial step forward. The Congress, with its institutional impulses toward earmarking and status quo budgeting, cannot be counted on to police itself. For true reform of the congressional spending process, we must rely on Internet-based transparency and on the willingness of ordinary citizens to involve themselves in policing the Congress. Timely information in the hands of voters and the media may prove the most powerful tool of all for reform.



# I. INTRODUCTION

## Growing Abuse of the Congressional Spending Process



**T**he 2006 midterm election confirmed what many political experts had been saying for some time: that the American public, unhappy with the recent performance of Congress, would turn to new leadership to address its concerns.

The reasons for public dissatisfaction with political leaders are many. The ongoing struggle to establish stability in Iraq appears to have been a particularly important issue in the election; and the widespread perception that the government responded poorly to Hurricane Katrina also undermined confidence in the administration and likely fed a general anti-“party in power” sentiment among voters.

But a key reason for voter dissatisfaction in 2006 was clearly displeasure with the way Congress has been handling the taxpayers’ money. A steady drumbeat of news stories documenting excessive and wasteful spending, as

well as outright corruption, contributed to the growing sense that the Republican Congress had abandoned its conservative fiscal principles to stay in power. The congressional spending process is now widely viewed by experts and the general public alike as lacking in basic integrity, with many voters no longer trusting that spending decisions are made in the public interest.

Congress's irresponsible spending practices come at a time when the government's resources are already low. The federal government's fiscal position has deteriorated substantially since 2001, the last year the government ran a surplus. The 2006 federal budget deficit was \$248 billion, down from \$318 billion in 2005, but the Congressional Budget Office projects that it will still be around \$100 billion in 2012 if the president's tax cuts are extended.<sup>1</sup> With the retirement of the baby boom generation fast approaching, there appears to be no end in sight to the government's growing debt burden.

To be sure, there are reasons beyond government policy for the deficits that emerged after 2001. The bursting of the tech stock bubble in 2000, the 2001 recession, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and several high-profile corporate scandals all contributed to falling federal revenues in 2001, 2002, and 2003. This three-year period marks the first time in more than forty years that revenues fell in three consecutive years.

But it is also true that, during his first term, President George W. Bush emphasized national priorities—fighting the global war on terrorism, accelerating economic and job growth, and improving homeland security and public health—more than strict fiscal balance. In his second term, Bush has put greater emphasis on deficit reduction and spending discipline, but not enough to reverse the impression that he and Republicans in Congress increase federal spending whenever it suits their purposes. The 2002 farm bill, the 2003 Medicare prescription drug bill, and the 2005 highway program are particularly noteworthy in this regard.

Far more damaging to Congress's integrity and to public trust in the institution, however, is the rampant pork barrel spending of recent years. In 2006, "earmarking" rose to appalling levels. This shadowy practice, which often takes place outside public scrutiny, enables lawmakers to designate funds for specific projects (and constituencies) rather than allocate funds to an agency for use at its discretion. (The practice, by the way, escalated rapidly just after Republicans gained control of Congress in 1994 and continued without interruption when a Republican gained control of the White House,



much to the chagrin of the fiscal conservatives.) Perhaps the most egregious earmark of all time is the infamous “bridge to nowhere,” inserted by Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK) in the 2005 transportation authorization bill, which would have connected a tiny Alaskan village to an even tinier Alaskan island—at a cost of \$223 million to American taxpayers.

But earmarking is not the only congressional spending habit in need of reform. Unlike most private-sector businesses, which over the past two decades have been forced to improve their productivity and eliminate unnecessary management layers to remain competitive in the global marketplace, the federal government continues to fund agencies without regard to efficiency or results. Congress simply passes the bill for these wasteful programs on to the American public.

The cost of congressional spending abuses is not to be measured simply in dollars. Earmarking and wasteful spending by Congress are harmful to American democracy and civic life. By undermining trust in Congress as an institution, these practices leave voters cynical and distrustful of government. But they can be curtailed. A new approach to congressional spending reform—simple transparency based on reporting of funding decisions and other relevant data on the Internet—empowers ordinary citizens to oversee how elected officials spend taxpayers’ money and has already proved successful.

## II.

# Excessive Congressional Earmarking

**A**lthough excessive earmarking signals a Congress more interested in procuring votes than in promoting the national interest, earmarking is in fact a natural by-product of our system of government. The Founding Fathers placed the authority to spend taxpayers' funds with the Congress and not with the president. As stated in Article I, Section 9, of the Constitution, "No money shall be drawn from the treasury, but in consequence of an appropriation made by law." This congressional "power of the purse" is one of the more important checks against the dangers of a too-powerful executive. Indeed, there may be no surer way to prevent the emergence of a king than to take away the executive's ability to spend the public purse on his singular command.

## The Institutional Incentives for Earmarking

**C**ongress itself has institutional leanings that influence how it spends money. Members of Congress are supposed to be responsive to narrow geographic interests; those desiring safe reelection must be highly attuned to the wishes and expectations of their constituents. With the power of the purse at their command, members understandably try to direct more federal resources "back home." Indeed, it is hard to blame a congressman or senator for pursuing funding for a district-based project that is sought by constituents.

The only possible internal check on a member's desire for an earmark would

be opposition to the earmark from his or her colleagues. And, in fact, Senators Tom Coburn (R-OK) and Jim DeMint (R-SC), who oppose the practice on principle, have recently distinguished themselves by successfully blocking thousands of earmarks in the 2007 appropriations.

But Coburn and DeMint are the exceptions rather than the rule. Historically, opposition to earmarking within Congress has at best been weak. The iron law of political math—concentrated benefits outweigh diffuse costs—seems particularly applicable in the context of earmarking. In other words, those who benefit from an earmark—generally a small number of constituents—tend to be grateful and vocal, while the millions of taxpayers nationwide who each pay a small cost are acquiescent. Of course, this iron law is reinforced by the fact that—until recently—most beneficiaries of earmarks were aware of their gains, while most of the “losers” were not aware of their costs.

Because so many members are themselves seeking earmarks, moreover, they cannot credibly oppose earmarks from one of their colleagues. Indeed, the practice of earmarking in Congress has almost the feel of an arms race. The more some members successfully pursue earmarks, the more other members get into the act to show that they, too, can be effective legislators for their constituents.

## Earmarking Defined

Reaching a consensus about the definition of earmarking has proved difficult. Earmarking as a political term comes from the practice of labeling an animal, typically a sheep, with a mark or tag on its ear to ensure that its value accrues to its rightful owner.

In the congressional context, funds are earmarked to ensure that a designated recipient or project gets the benefit of the funds provided—effectively putting the funds outside the regular process for distribution. Absent the earmark, the targeted recipient may or may not have gotten the funds through the normal process, which often involves competition with other potential projects or grantees.

Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW), a spending watchdog organization, applies a very broad definition, labeling as earmarks items

in appropriations and authorization bills that meet any one of seven criteria, including projects that are not specifically authorized.<sup>2</sup> This definition captures items that may be unauthorized for reasons completely separate from any intention to target spending on a narrow constituency.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB), by contrast, uses a definition that excludes from the list of earmarked items any request included in the president's budget.<sup>3</sup> This definition has an obvious bias that is resented by Congress, as it deems the president incapable of earmarking even though there are clearly some items in the administration's request each year that are intended to bypass the normal process to ensure a funding outcome. And the Congressional Research Service (CRS) uses yet another approach: it tallies earmarks based on the accepted historical practices of individual subcommittees, which are not uniform.

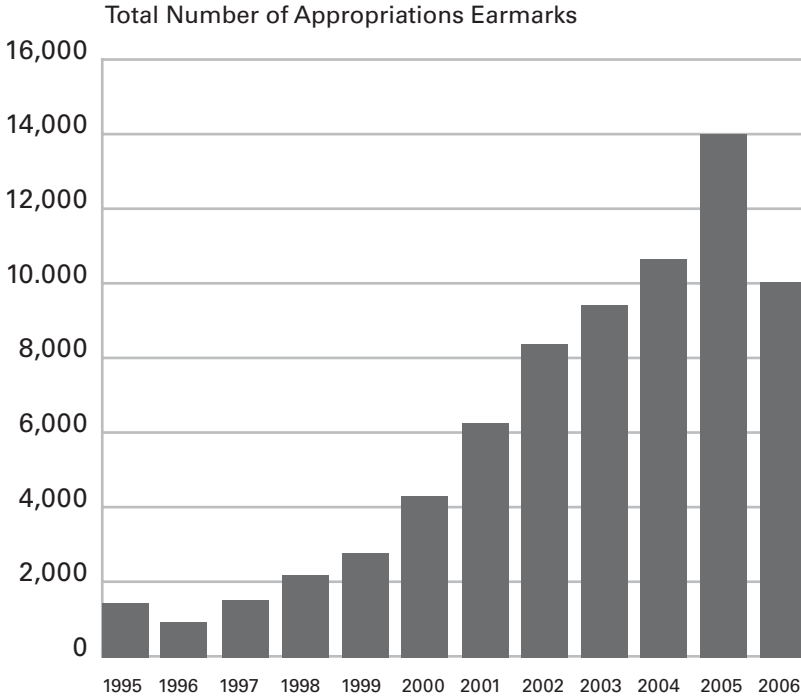
A commonsense definition of earmarking comes from Scott Lilly, former top Democratic staff person at the House Appropriations Committee and now a researcher at the Center for American Progress. In March 2006 testimony before a Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs subcommittee, he said that earmarking takes place “[w]hen the government grants something of value that belongs to the entire country to a specific community, company, organization or individual based on parochial political interests rather than broader national priorities.”<sup>4</sup> It is this wasteful and inappropriate spending that must be curtailed.

## The Growth of Earmarked Spending

**N**o matter what definition is used, there is no doubt that the practice of earmarking by Congress has escalated dramatically in the past decade.

Chart 1 shows CAGW's assessment of the total number of appropriations earmarks by year, from 1995 to 2006 (thus excluding authorization bills, such as the highway authorization law). As shown, the total number of appropriations earmarks increased from 1,439 in FY 1995 to 9,963 in FY 2006—a 600 percent increase.

# Chart 1: Earmarking Growth



Source: Citizens Against Government Waste, Historical Database

CRS has found a similar trend in an analysis of the thirteen appropriations bills from 1994 to 2005. (The House and Senate reduced the number of appropriations measures at the beginning of 2005; CRS's analysis uses the previous and long-standing bill structure to allow ready comparisons to prior years).

According to CRS, earmarking escalated dramatically in nearly every major appropriations measure between 1994 and 2005, as chart 2 shows. The Defense Department appropriations bill had 587 earmarks in 1994, according to CRS's definition. In 2005, there were 2,506 earmarks in that appropriations bill. Similarly, the appropriations bill for the Departments of

## Chart 2: Appropriations Bill Earmarks

	Total Earmarks			Earmark Spending (\$Billions)		
	FY 1994	FY 2005	Change	FY 1994	FY 2005	Change
Agriculture	313	704	+125%	0.2	0.5	+129%
Commerce-Justice-State	253	1722	+581%	2.7	9.5	+252%
Defense	587	2506	+327%	4.2	9.0	+113%
District of Columbia	0	95	n/a	0	0.1	n/a
Energy & Water	1574	2313	+47%	5.5	4.9	-11%
Foreign Operations	9	254	+2722%	5.4	10.5	+95%
Interior	314	568	+81%	0.5	0.8	+61%
Labor-HHS	5	3014	+60180%	0.0	1.2	+49045%
Legislative	1	6	+500%	--	--	+670%
Military Construction	895	504	-44%	3.8	6.6	+76%
Transportation	140	2094	+1396%	0.9	3.3	+260%
Treasury-Postal	48	22	-54%	1.2	0.7	-42%
VA-HUD	30	2080	+6833%	0.0	1.0	+895%

Source: "Earmarks in Appropriation Acts: FY1994, FY1996, FY1998, FY2000, FY2002, FY2004, FY2005," Congressional Research Service, January 26, 2006

Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development had relatively few earmarks in 1994—just 30, according to CRS. By 2005, the earmarks numbered 2,080.

Indeed, in years past, earmarking was often regarded as a means of building broader support for appropriations measures. Budget observers would often note that, while earmarking was a nuisance, its costs were relatively small. CRS's analysis provides a basis for this contention. In 1994, the cost of earmarking in the bill funding the Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State was \$2.7 billion. By 2005, CRS finds, the cost had increased to \$9.5 billion, a nearly \$7 billion increase. Earmarking had thus ceased to be a nuisance and become something closer to a monster.

It should be noted that eliminating all earmarks would not allow Congress to cut spending by the amounts shown in chart 2. Absent earmarks, some of the funding provided in the appropriations bills would still likely be viewed as necessary to ensure adequate support for the programs in question. In a sense, then, particularly in the eyes of many in Congress, earmarking is seen more as a reduction in agency funding discretion than as an additional cost to the federal government.

Nonetheless, the total amount of funds associated with earmarking has grown dramatically in the last decade, as shown in chart 2, and this growth has meant either that total spending has gone up to accommodate the earmarks, or that program discretion in the agencies has declined dramatically. Either is cause for concern, and it is likely that the rise in earmarking has meant both higher federal budget deficits *and* substantially reduced executive agency discretion.

## What's Wrong with Earmarking?

Not surprisingly, earmarking has its defenders in Congress. In February 2006, two self-described fiscal conservatives from Idaho—Representative Mike Simpson and Senator Larry Craig, both Republicans—issued a vigorous defense of the practice. Earmarking, they argued, grows out of the Founding Fathers' conception of federal spending. According to Simpson and Craig, when the framers of the Constitution placed the power of the

purse in Congress, they fully intended that elected representatives, not “faceless bureaucrats,” should decide how funds are spent in local communities. As Simpson and Craig put it, “When more of [an agency’s budget] is earmarked, the less federal agencies have to grow their bloated bureaucracies.”<sup>5</sup>

This argument fails to address the very real threats that earmarking poses to democracy and public trust in government:

## Earmarking undermines an appropriate understanding of the federal role under the Constitution.

■ Simpson and Craig assert that earmarking is a more “constitutional” approach to allocation of federal funding than executive branch administration. This claim distorts the original understanding of the power of the purse. It was understood more clearly in the early days of the country that Congress’s authority to spend taxpayer funds was limited by the “common Defense and general Welfare” clause. That is, Congress’s authority to spend was not unlimited, but was rather granted only for national purposes.<sup>6</sup>

In the nineteenth century, numerous presidents vetoed spending bills for this very reason. In 1822, for instance, President James Monroe vetoed a bill providing funds to repair the Cumberland Road, originating in Cumberland, Maryland, because the bill crossed the line from a national purpose to a strictly local one.<sup>7</sup> The framers recognized that healthy federalism requires a proper distribution of political accountability. It is critically important that taxpayers within a local community be asked to pay for local improvements. The possibility of sharing the costs with taxpayers nationwide only invites evasion rather than responsibility from state and local elected officials, and leads to members of Congress being inundated with new requests for earmarked funds.

## Earmarking contributes to the problem of “invisible” government.

■ The legislative process—for earmarks or other forms of special-interest legislation—is often manipulated to prevent any public or media investigation of a provision until it is too late to stop it.



Earmarks are rarely inserted in either the House or Senate versions of an appropriations bill. Instead, months go by as Congress follows the regular process of hearings, committee markups, and House and Senate floor debate. Then, when the House and Senate finally meet in conference to resolve the differences between the two bills, earmarks are suddenly placed in the bill in a closed-door session of the key Appropriations Committee members. At that stage, House and Senate members have little if any time to read the compromise House-Senate bill before having to vote on it for final passage. Typically, the vote occurs with time running out on a continuing resolution, a temporary funding measure to keep the government open. Under these circumstances, many otherwise offensive provisions find their way into the bill that is sent to the president.

This practice of last-minute earmarking is the norm, not the exception. President Bush, in his 2007 State of the Union address, stated that 90 percent of all earmarks never appear in the versions of bills passed by the House or Senate.<sup>8</sup> Instead, they are inserted in conference, shortly before the bills are sent to him for his signature.

The problem of “invisible” legislating is not confined to appropriations bills. In December 2006, Congress was putting the finishing touches on a complex health care, tax, and trade bill. After the bill was passed and sent to the president for his approval, the media had a chance to look more closely at it and noticed several provisions that no one in the public had seen before, including one benefiting certain health insurance providers, one benefiting a hospital in Tennessee, and one benefiting a hospice center in Nevada.

The first provision was apparently inserted into the bill by former Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert (R-IL) even after it had been rejected by other members in the final stages of the negotiations. Indeed, at least one of the other key participants assumed that it had been dropped and was outraged to discover later that it had been inserted back into the bill without his knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

## Competition and grant-making rules protect taxpayers and ensure integrity.

■ Earmarking bypasses the normal process for allocation of program funds. Although Simpson and Craig ridicule this process as bureaucratic, it is designed to foster competition, fairness, and integrity in funding of grantees. For nonearmarked funds, most programs require a rigorous and transparent process for grading applications, and the competition is generally intense. Researchers at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), for instance, submit applications for new scientific investigations, which are graded by peer reviewers. Grants are made based on those scores. The competition for NIH funding is fierce: over the years, there have generally been two applications rejected for every one that has been funded. And the public benefits from this competitive process. While one may quibble with the quality of some grants that are funded, the emphasis on competition, consensus, and scientific opinion creates a dynamic that rewards the public with better health care.

## Innocent earmarking is a short step from corruption.

■ While most earmarking is innocently intended by congressmen or senators who mean to do well for their district or state, stepping outside the normal rules for funding allocation is an invitation to unscrupulous behavior. Indeed, if the normal bureaucratic rules are in place, bad actors are most likely to steer clear of the process because they know that their activities will be scrutinized by the grant-making bureaucracy. But once Congress directly funds specific budgetary items, those seeking funds for inappropriate purposes—such as their own personal enrichment—will gravitate to Congress, recognizing that congressional staff simply does not have the time or capacity to carefully examine every request. In this environment, bad apples will inevitably attempt to manipulate the process for their unethical, and sometimes illegal, personal gain.

Earmarking diverts staff and member time and attention from more important national issues.

■ In 2005, the Labor, Health, and Human Services and Education Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee received fifteen thousand earmark requests from Senate offices. Scott Lilly estimates that a stack of these requests—assuming just one page for each—would reach ten feet into the air.<sup>10</sup> Staff in each Senate office had to spend time producing these requests—on average 150 of them—and the small staff of the Senate Appropriations Committee had to process them. Processing earmark requests has become a large part of the Appropriations Committee workload, to the detriment of attention to genuine national priorities, such as public health, educational improvement, and workplace safety enforcement.

## The Line-Item Veto: An Answer to Earmarking?

What recourse does the president have when presented with a spending bill loaded with earmarks? Simply vetoing the bill is often not a real option. Spending bills are generally aimed at important national priorities—such as defense or health research—and presidents generally have higher priorities in these bills than keeping earmarks to a minimum. A president who has troops engaged in combat, for instance, is much more concerned about funding that effort than in quashing the accompanying wasteful earmarks. Vetoes of bills based on earmarks alone have therefore been rare.

Recognizing the difficulty of using the veto alone to combat pork barrel spending, presidents have been seeking for many years to alter the balance of power with Congress over spending and to give themselves the authority to act more unilaterally to control narrow-purpose provisions. Congress, of course, has resisted such efforts. Indeed, even as the president has grown more dominant in modern times in the conduct of foreign policy, Congress

has fought to hold its ground in an ongoing struggle with the executive branch over budgetary matters.

One of the most serious threats to congressional spending authority in the nation's history was mounted by President Richard Nixon. That confrontation triggered changes that shaped the modern congressional budget process. In 1973, in what was clearly an effort to shift power over government spending decisions away from Congress and toward the executive, Nixon sought to impound—or not spend—money that had been duly appropriated by Congress. Congress reacted to this aggressive encroachment on its spending prerogatives by passing the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974 (CBA), which constrained the scope and duration of the president's authority to hold up the spending of appropriated funds, and which a weakened Nixon signed into law in July 1974.<sup>11</sup>

The CBA established the modern congressional budget process and in so doing strengthened Congress's spending authority. In particular, the CBA created the House and Senate Budget Committees; the Congressional Budget Office, whose cost estimates and projections of the federal budget aggregates have given Congress the ability to ignore or dispute estimates provided by OMB and other executive departments and agencies; the concurrent resolution on the budget; and expedited procedures for considering legislation implementing spending and tax measures called for in a congressional budget. In short, the CBA built a budget process infrastructure in Congress to match, and to provide a counterbalance to, the executive branch's budget process, which culminates annually in the submission of the president's budget.

Strengthening Congress's spending powers as it does, the CBA has driven efforts to secure presidential line-item veto authority, which gives the president the power to reject narrow-purpose funding even as he signs into law the larger funding measure containing the earmark. Not surprisingly, presidents from both major political parties have supported the line-item veto, including President Ronald Reagan and President Bill Clinton. It was Clinton who signed the Line Item Veto Act of 1996 into law on April 9, 1996.<sup>12</sup> By the end of 1997, he had used it eighty-two times to cut expenditures in eleven spending bills, saving the taxpayers an estimated \$2 billion over several years.<sup>13</sup>

But the line-item veto, controversial both before and after its passage in

Congress, appears to be of questionable legality. An initial challenge to the act, brought by six legislators in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, was dismissed when the Supreme Court said that the case was not ripe for review. Following a second challenge to the act—*Clinton v. City of New York*—the Supreme Court ruled in a six to three decision that the Line Item Veto Act violated the Constitution’s structure for how bills must be presented to the president for signature into law.<sup>14</sup>

The decision strongly suggests that an effective legislative approach to a line-item veto will be difficult to construct.<sup>15</sup> It would appear that the most direct route to an effective presidential role in the process would be through a constitutional amendment. But it is doubtful that members of the House and Senate would ever willingly support an amendment constraining their power over the government’s purse in sufficient numbers for it to pass.<sup>16</sup>

### III.

## Spending Without Regard to Performance



**A**s significant a problem as earmarking is, it is by no means the most serious problem related to congressional spending. Despite four decades of efforts by the executive branch, Congress continues to create and fund new programs without any clear expectation for program performance or results. With pressure growing on taxpayer funds as the population ages and entitlement spending increases, there is simply no room in the federal budget for spending that does not produce something worthwhile for taxpayers.

The motivation for budget and performance integration is straightforward. In the business world, the profit motive provides substantial incentive for business operators to seek higher quality and lower costs. Government programs, however, have no such motive. As a consequence, without clear political accountability requirements, many government agencies and programs aimed at important public functions such as public safety can operate

for many years without ever facing any questions regarding their performance. They have no incentive to improve because, in the end, they get their taxpayer-financed budget regardless of how well they have performed.

This waste and inefficiency are unacceptable. There is no reason that private-sector strategies to reward performance should not be applied more broadly within government. An agency could be required to link every budget dollar requested from the legislature to a particular outcome—such as a lower crime rate. Then the outcome could actually be measured to see if the agency delivered on its promised public service. The actual performance of the agency in achieving the outcome becomes, in this context, a significant tool for accountability and a central focus in budgetary decision making. In effect, with budget and performance integration, legislators can tell taxpayers what they will get for their money.<sup>17</sup>

## Previous Incarnations of Federal Performance Budgeting

Unfortunately, plans to integrate budget and performance have been tried by every administration in recent history, regardless of its ideology, and have had no lasting impact because they were not institutionalized by the Congress. These are some of the more notable efforts:

### President Johnson and planning, programming, and budgeting.

■ Secretary Robert McNamara brought with him to the Department of Defense (DoD) a strong belief in quantitative management of complex enterprises, particularly as it was applied in the private sector. McNamara's concept—planning, programming, and budgeting, or PPB—aimed to connect funding requirements with a production process designed to achieve a set of quantifiable goals. This rigorous approach, which McNamara sought to instill throughout DoD, was really the first budget and performance

integration effort taken up by the federal government. The PPB effort eventually stalled, largely because of the Vietnam War and ongoing difficulty by agencies in settling on measurable program outcomes.

## President Carter and zero-based budgeting.

■ Zero-based budgeting (ZBB) builds a program's or agency's budget from scratch each fiscal year instead of basing the budget on funding provided the previous year plus an increment. Designed to eliminate an entitlement mentality and promote overall restraint in spending, ZBB is used by many private-sector enterprises. Governor Jimmy Carter used ZBB at the state level in Georgia<sup>18</sup> and, as president, announced that the federal government would use it as well. He promised to cut down bureaucracy and waste by reducing the number of federal agencies from nineteen hundred to two hundred.<sup>19</sup> Some unsubstantial cuts were made to advisory committees and the like, but no agency was ever terminated.

## The Grace Commission.

■ In 1982, President Ronald Reagan established his Private Sector Survey on Cost Control—commonly known as the Grace Commission, named after its chairman, J. Peter Grace. The president directed the commission to “work like tireless bloodhounds to root out government inefficiency and waste of tax dollars.”<sup>20</sup> The result was forty-seven volumes and twenty-one thousand pages detailing inefficiencies in government spending and providing suggestions on how to scale back costs. The commission estimated that its 2,478 recommendations would save taxpayers \$424.4 billion over three years and \$1.9 trillion by the year 2000, or an average of \$141.5 billion a year “without raising taxes, without weakening America’s needed defense build-up, and without in any way harming necessary social welfare programs.”<sup>21</sup> Two decades later, it is doubtful that taxpayers are benefiting much, if at all, from these recommendations.



## The National Performance Review.

■ Begun by President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore in 1993 and continued throughout their two terms in office, the National Performance Review (NPR) sought to make good on President Clinton’s campaign promise to “radically change the way government operates—to shift from top down bureaucracy to entrepreneurial government.”<sup>22</sup> Its mission, as stated in its reports, was to focus “primarily on how government should work, not on what it should do.”<sup>23</sup> The program made more than twelve hundred specific recommendations for a government that “works better and costs less.” At the end of President Clinton’s first term, the administration claimed substantial progress, including a downsizing of the federal workforce, a reduction in paperwork, and some modest reduction in obsolete programs.<sup>24</sup> NPR’s real impact on government operations was more modest. For instance, although NPR advocates claimed credit for downsizing the workforce, the cost to taxpayers for federal employee pay increased 8.2 percent between 1992 and 1996.<sup>25</sup>

## The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993.

■ The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) was signed into law by President Clinton in 1993 and is unique among recent government reform initiatives in that it is a legal, permanent requirement for government agencies. It seeks objective and measurable performance goals for congressional and executive branch budgeting processes, and it requires agencies with budgets exceeding \$20 million to have a detailed five-year strategic plan, an annual performance plan, and an annual performance report. GPRA’s weakness is that agencies themselves control the reporting process, which leads to more bureaucratic and useless information rather than concrete accountability. Agencies can cite scores of program performance measures, diluting the impact of fewer, more difficult to measure and achieve outcome goals. More than a decade after it became law, GPRA appears to have had little measurable impact on government performance.

# The Bush Administration's Performance Assessment Rating Tool (PART)

In 2001, President Bush launched his own approach to improved management of the executive branch. There is some cause for optimism that this program will at last help to curtail wasteful spending by integrating agencies' performance and budget. The overall strategy—the President's Management Agenda—is aimed at improving federal government management in five key areas: the strategic use of human capital; competitive sourcing of potentially commercial activities; improved services through e-government and information technology systems; improved financial reporting; and integration of budgetary decisions with program performance.<sup>26</sup>

Among the program's strengths is an innovative accountability system for agency heads. Each quarter, OMB uses a "stoplight" scorecard—with ratings of green, yellow, and red—to assess the extent to which agency goals have been met. Another strength of the program is a systematic and comprehensive measurement instrument for program performance across all agencies of the federal government: the Performance Assessment Rating Tool, or PART. Programs are rated by a standard series of yes/no questions, which allows for a consistent analysis across programs with very different public policy missions. A short explanation, including any pertinent evidence, is also required to support the answer. PART questionnaires are built for seven different federal program types, with questions split into four basic categories, as shown in chart 3.

Programs are given an overall rating based on the weighted average scores built from the answers to the PART questions. As shown in chart 3, the most weight is given to measuring and achieving relevant program outcomes. For many programs, identifying measurable and clear program outcome goals is the most difficult task associated with PART implementation.

The PART was constructed initially by professional staff at OMB in 2002,

and then gradually vetted and refined with input from experts from around the federal government. Beginning with the 2004 president’s budget, approximately 20 percent of federal programs have been newly assessed using the instrument each year, and the results have been published with the president’s annual budget submission to Congress. The administration has completed PART assessments of 96 percent of federal programs as of February 2007. The remaining programs are expected to be rated in the next two years.<sup>27</sup>

After undergoing a PART review, programs are put into one of five

### Chart 3: PART Structure

Questionnaire by Type of Federal Program:	
Block Grant / Formula Grant	Direct Federal
Capital Assets & Service Acquisition	Regulatory-Based
Competitive Grant	Research & Development
Credit	

Question Sections	Program Purpose & Design	Strategic Planning	Good Management	Program Results
Number of Questions	5	9	11	6
Weight in Total Score	20%	10%	20%	50%

Source: Part 101: Introductory Training (powerpoint), OMB, pp. 9, 17

different categories ranging from “effective” to “ineffective.” These categories, and the percentage of federal programs rated to date that fall within them, are shown in chart 4. Programs that do not have acceptable program performance measures are put into the “results not demonstrated” category—no matter the score on the other parts of the questionnaire.

**Chart 4: PART Structure**

Program Rating	Results Not Demonstrated	Ineffective	Adequate	Moderately Effective	Effective
Weight Score Rating Range	n/a	0-49	50-69	70-84	85-100
Programs Rated in Each Category (Total=977)	215 (22%)	29 (3%)	274 (28%)	293 (30%)	166 (17%)

Source: [www.whitehouse.gov/omb/expectmore/about.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/expectmore/about.html)

## Congressional Indifference

Of course, the most promising approaches to spending reform can be thwarted by an uncooperative Congress. To date, Congress’s reaction to executive branch performance initiatives ranges from indifference to hostility. The long history of executive branch efforts to improve efficiency and performance accountability in federal operations itself makes clear that Congress has not bought into the performance budgeting effort.

Indeed, there is virtually no evidence that the voluminous PART information collected and disseminated by OMB since 2002 has had any impact

on congressional spending decisions. According to Eileen Norcross of George Mason University, the president's 2006 budget submission to Congress explicitly linked proposals to terminate or cut fifty-four programs to PART-driven evaluations. By contrast, the House Appropriations Committee terminated fifty-three programs in the budgeting process, but little or no information was provided by the committee justifying the cuts, nor was PART or other systematic performance information referenced as an information source.<sup>28</sup>

Some congressional subcommittees have gone beyond passive indifference to PART to restrained hostility. In its report accompanying the 2007 appropriations bill, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Treasury, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development referred to PART as "drowning in pleonasm, and yet still devoid of useful information."<sup>29</sup>

One reason for Congress's reluctance to embrace PART or any other approach to performance budgeting is the dispersion of spending power through the congressional committee structure. The House and Senate delegate most legislative authority to "committees of jurisdiction," such as the Appropriations and Ways and Means Committees in the House. It is these committees, not the Budget Committee, that make the important authorizing, spending, and taxing decisions for programs in their jurisdictions. For Congress to undertake a systematic approach to performance budgeting, the powerful and numerous committee chairmen and their ranking members would have to embrace it. Having spent many years waiting to become committee chairmen or ranking members, they are reluctant to give legitimacy to any outside process that could limit their authority over the programs they now oversee.

Further, committee chairmen have no incentive to participate in voluntary budget-cutting exercises. Indeed, there is a bias toward jealous protection of agency budgets within committees, even for low-performing programs, to protect, and possibly increase, the committee's slice of the budget pie. There is simply no political incentive for committee or subcommittee chairmen to cut spending in their jurisdiction unilaterally—the funds would be lost to them and possibly used to increase funding in other committees.

# IV.

## Policing Congress with Internet-Based Transparency

*A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.*

—President James Madison, August 1822<sup>30</sup>

*Publicity is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants; electric light the most efficient policeman.*

—Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, December 1913<sup>31</sup>

*If television created this generation of politicians, what will the Internet do to the next generation of politicians?*

—Google Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Eric Schmidt, October 2006<sup>32</sup>

*That would be unilaterally disarming Congress's power of the purse.*

—Unnamed House Appropriations Committee spokesperson, on the possibility of passing an earmark-free, long-term continuing resolution for unresolved fiscal year 2007 spending measures, November 21, 2006<sup>33</sup>

**I**ronically, 2006—the year of the Abramoff scandal and of earmarking run amok—may have also seen the beginnings of a more lasting reform movement, one based on empowering the one group with the most power to change Congress's spending priorities: ordinary voters. The new approach to congressional spending reform—simple transparency based on

reporting of funding decisions and other relevant data on the Internet—may prove more powerful and enduring than the more cumbersome and intrusive efforts of years past.

## The Bridge to Nowhere: Beginning of a New Era?

The 2005 transportation authorization bill—intended to establish and update the federal-state highway program—took the process of earmarking to a level not seen before. The 1998 authorization bill included 1,850 earmarks;<sup>34</sup> the 2005 bill contained 5,092.<sup>35</sup> Some earmarked projects aimed at building or improving roads (3,762), bike and foot paths (418), and bridges and tunnels (359). But some were for museums and other projects not strictly related to transportation (291), as well mass transportation projects (44), and intermodal facilities and improvements (218).<sup>36</sup> As critics charged at the time it was passed and signed into law by President Bush, an otherwise useful bill was grossly marred by excessive earmarking.

But it was the now-notorious “bridge to nowhere” that really stood out and galvanized a grassroots coalition to take a stand. Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska championed an earmark for a \$223 million bridge to connect his state’s village of Ketchikan (population 8,900) with the airport on Gravina Island (population 50).<sup>37</sup> This earmark came to represent all that was wrong with congressional spending practices. To spend so much on a project that would benefit so few seemed foolish, if not absurd. Americans questioned why the funds could not be put to a much better use, such as rebuilding in the regions hit by Hurricane Katrina.

The discovery of this earmark after the bill was signed into law produced a flood of criticism. Newspaper editorials, watchdog groups, think tanks, even the Sierra Club heaped ridicule on a Congress so out of control and out of touch that it could not see that this project was a waste of taxpayers’ dollars. But it was the new Internet-based news culture that really drove the grassroots opposition to the earmark, with activists on both the left and the right logging on regularly to blogs and associated websites to learn more about the project’s status.

As public pressure on Congress to scuttle the earmark continued to build, fueled largely by an Internet-connected electorate willing to bombard Senate offices with e-mail requests to terminate funding for the project, Stevens dug in for a fight. He would resign if the Senate “discriminated against” Alaska.<sup>38</sup>

But the grassroots pressure proved too great. In November 2005, Stevens relented, and the House and Senate passed a measure killing the earmark but leaving the funds in Alaska to be allocated by the state.

Pork barrel opponents rejoiced. For the first time in memory, those bearing the “diffuse costs” of earmarking had successfully rallied a coalition to oppose a project.

## FFATA and ExpectMore.gov: Empowering the Public to Police the Congress

**I**t was the Internet that made it possible to kill the “bridge to nowhere.” The Internet was also the basis of a bill introduced in April 2006 by Senators Tom Coburn and Barack Obama (D-IL), the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, or FFATA (S. 2590). Designed to increase the transparency of government spending, the bill requires OMB to establish by January 2008 a new, publicly accessible, online database disclosing the recipients of any federal funding in excess of \$25,000.

Predictably, the bill faced strong opposition. Taking advantage of the process that allows a senator to anonymously keep a bill off the floor for a vote, an unknown opponent held the FFATA in limbo.

But the Internet-based coalition of groups and citizens forged in the “bridge to nowhere” fight again became energized in support of FFATA. In an unprecedented display of grassroots activism through cyberspace, bloggers undertook a systematic campaign to expose and defeat the anonymous holds on the bill. Two high-profile bloggers collaborated to form Porkbusters.org, and the new website called on all concerned citizens to contact their senators and ask that they affirm on the record that they had not placed



the hold on the bill. The only two senators who did not publicly deny responsibility were both well-known defenders of the power of the purse: Robert Byrd (D-WV) and Stevens, the patron of the “bridge to nowhere.”<sup>39</sup>

Once the proponents of FFATA had isolated the opposition, they made sure the Senate was barraged with requests for Byrd and Stevens to drop their holds on the bill. The publicity associated with the standoff and the resulting political activism were clearly aided by the rapid spread of information through the blogging community. Byrd and Stevens were forced to drop their holds under political pressure from their colleagues. On September 26, 2006, President George W. Bush signed the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act into law.<sup>40</sup>

The Internet database required by FFATA will include a master list of persons and organizations receiving more than \$25,000 in federal funds, including their location and the amount of funds received each year. The new law requires OMB to post all monetary awards to the tracking database within thirty days of their disbursement from the Treasury.<sup>41</sup> As Bush said when signing the bill into law, “Information on earmarks will no longer be hidden deep in the pages of a federal budget bill, but [will be] just a few clicks away.”<sup>42</sup>

Less prominent but perhaps just as important is the new website dedicated to dissemination of PART-related information. ExpectMore.gov provides detailed PART results for every program that has had a PART evaluation. For many programs, the website includes links to thorough and independent program evaluations, which often form the basis for the substantive answers in PART’s assessment of program performance.

The launching and development of these two new Internet tools for citizen and media research into government spending represent a substantial step forward. In the past, citizen awareness of government spending and decision making was severely limited by the lack of easily accessible public information. Congress publishes its appropriations bills and reports, and the *Congressional Record* provides detailed recording of legislative action. But neither of these sources is easily accessed by the average citizen, nor does either capture all of the information needed to clearly identify what the implications of the decisions are. The Internet solves these problems.

## Congress's First Steps

The newly elected 110th Congress has a mandate from the American people to clean up the congressional spending process. And there are some promising signals from the incoming leadership. David Obey (D-WI) and Robert Byrd, the new chairmen of the House and Senate Appropriations Committee, have announced that they plan to put in place a full-year continuing resolution (CR) for fiscal year 2007, which would leave most of the federal government operating at a spending level close to that of 2006. Perhaps more important, no earmarks would be included in the full-year CR. The Senate gave final approval to the Obey-Byrd CR approach in late February, thus endorsing the single most dramatic limit on earmarking to date.

But what will happen beyond the CR is very much an open question. Both Obey and Byrd are long-time practitioners of earmarking. And the institutional pressures that drove Republicans to pork barrel will exert the same influence on the new Democratic members of Congress. To keep earmarking in check over the long run will likely require more than a simple change in party leadership.

It is Congress's own ambivalence about reform that has hampered other attempts to address problems with spending. Bursts of enthusiasm for reform occur, such as a fourteen-point plan to deal with earmarks and other budget issues put together last year by House Democrats David Obey, Barney Frank (MA), Tom Allen (ME), and David Price (NC) and supported by Nancy Pelosi (CA). The reform package sought to prohibit members from earmarking without disclosing any potential financial interests that they may have in the organizations receiving federal funding.<sup>43</sup> In the Senate, meanwhile, Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) proposed a rule requiring sixty votes for any earmark added to a conference report that was not in the original version of the bill. The proposal was unanimously approved by the Senate Rules Committee.

But the enthusiasm for reform has proven impossible to sustain in either the House or Senate. Leaders in both chambers largely walked away from these reform efforts when they could not get rank-and-file members to

support some of the more radical changes put on the table. In the end, the only significant change that passed was a change in House rules (H. Res. 1000), which requires the full disclosure of earmarks in all committees, including names of the sponsors. The measure expired at the end of the congressional session because it was a rule and not a law. The Senate's simultaneous efforts to amend its own earmarking rules were cut short when the session expired.

Indeed, spending reform efforts that depend entirely on Congress's continued adherence to rules that Congress itself writes seem destined to fail. Over time, the overwhelming institutional impulses that push toward earmarking and status quo budgeting will reemerge, and Congress's rules will accommodate these impulses.

## Congressional Participation in Internet-Based Transparency

Instead of relying on Congress to reform itself, reformers should focus their energy on extending into 2007 and beyond the momentum for transparency generated in 2006. In particular, reformers should push Congress and the executive branch to build into the FFATA and ExpectMore.gov databases the explicit effects of congressional spending decisions.

First, the FFATA database should explicitly identify the congressional sponsor for any item in the database that is the result of an earmark. The president could request this as a legislative requirement, but since Congress is unlikely to quickly agree to such a step, OMB should take on the responsibility of identifying and including earmark sponsors in the database. Researchers would then be able to track grants and contracts not just to the recipients but to the patrons as well.

Second, ExpectMore.gov should be expanded to assess not just how federal programs perform, but how the president and Congress use information on program performance. A new spending scorecard could be developed to line up the effects of congressional spending decisions against the PART scores of programs. That way, voters and the media could assess more

accurately whether Congress funds programs that are working or programs that have little to show for their efforts. If time permitted, the spending scorecard could be updated regularly, at each stage of the congressional process, so that concerned citizens—the blogging community in particular—would have the opportunity to influence Congress before final action makes it too late.

Congress is likely to object to being included in the PART process. But congressional opposition should not in any way stop OMB from acting unilaterally. Moreover, OMB should continue to use an open and transparent rating process—PART—until Congress proposes an acceptable and rigorous alternative.

## V. Conclusion



**F**or too long, congressional spending has been wasteful and inefficient. Too many congressional spending decisions have been made outside public scrutiny, and too many have funded with federal dollars what are purely local projects. But there is hope for reform. The new transparency tool—the Internet—may have more transformative power than anyone can yet imagine. The Congress is nothing if not a responsive political institution. Using the Internet to monitor both congressional spending decisions (as they evolve and once they are final) and the performance of government programs could provide a real check on earmarking and wasteful spending.

The political firestorm over the “bridge to nowhere” may be a sign of things to come. The Internet played a crucial role as both an information source for voters and a means for rallying a strong political force. In this instance, the bearers of the “diffuse costs”—effectively everyone not living in Alaska—banded together in cyberspace and made it clear to Congress that the political pain of continuing the project far outweighed the gains. And Congress responded to these strong political signals by canceling the funding.

But it remains the case that Congress’s institutional biases and structure

favor earmarking and program immortality. Members of Congress are elected to be responsive to their constituents, and the temptation is very great to serve them by directing federal resources to local projects. Moreover, Congress's committee-based decision-making structure stifles performance-based budgeting, as committee members tend to be program advocates who are reluctant to aggressively change direction with regard to program goals and funding.

Thus the long-identified defects of the congressional spending process cannot be fundamentally corrected without altering the balance of power between Congress and the executive branch dictated by the Constitution. And efforts to alter this balance are both unlikely and—given the nature of the defects—unwarranted.

For further improvements in the congressional spending process, then, we must rely on Internet-based transparency and on the willingness of ordinary citizens to involve themselves in policing the Congress. Timely information in the hands of voters and the media may prove the most powerful tool of all for reform. ♦

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president exercised this option, he was required to give the Congress notification of cancellation within five days of signing the larger bill into law. The law required the president to certify that the cancellation of the funding would reduce the federal budget deficit, would not impair essential government functions, and would not harm the national interest. Congress then had thirty days to disagree with the presidential cancellation. Expedited procedures were established to ensure that Congress, and particularly the Senate, could act quickly to send a disapproval bill back to the president. Congress could disapprove of a presidential cancellation with a simple majority vote. If it disapproved of the president's cancellation, Congress would send a "bill of disapproval" containing the items back to the president. The president could then veto the disapproval bill, which would go back to the Congress for consideration. To override this veto, Congress would need a two-thirds majority in both houses. See Virginia S. McMurtry, "Item Veto and Expanded Impoundment Proposals," CRS Issue Brief for Congress, IB89148, Congressional Research Service, updated November 22, 2004, pp. 6-8.

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*Improving Congressional Spending Habits* provides a concise explanation of the forces driving Congress's wasteful spending practices. It also points the way to a possible remedy: full, internet-based disclosure of congressional spending decisions so taxpayers and voters can hold their representatives accountable.

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