



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

March 11, 2009

Contact: Rob Blumenthal (202) 224-1010 / John Bray (202) 224-3751

Chairman Inouye Statement on Earmark Reform

WASHINGTON, DC – Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii) issued the following statement today in response to President Barack Obama’s remarks on earmark reform:

“I wish to thank President Obama for his remarks this morning with regard to final passage of the 2009 Omnibus Act. The legislation the President signs today will provide resources where they are required, and will provide much-needed guidance to the agencies and departments that are funded for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2009. I would note that the Senate Appropriations Committee has now completed two significant pieces of legislation in just the first 50 days of the new Administration, and I hope this success in these first few days will be a harbinger of things to come as we turn our attention to Fiscal Year 2010.

“I very much appreciate President Obama’s announcement today in support of reforming the practice of Congressional earmarking. The President was quick to recognize the important reforms that we have already implemented in the two years that Democrats have been in control of the Congress. The reforms we have already implemented ensure that the earmarking process now has an unprecedented level of transparency, accountability and openness. Under Democratic leadership, we have regained control of the process.

“In his statement, the President said that ‘I recognize that Congress has the power of the purse, and as a former Senator, I believe that individual members of Congress understand their districts best. They should have the ability to respond to the needs of their communities.’ I fully agree with the President that Senators and Congressmen know the needs of their constituents and their districts, and that when it comes to deciding which projects should receive funding, it is the elected representatives of the people who are best positioned to make these difficult decisions.

“Others have suggested that our hard-working and well-meaning federal employees should be the ones to make all these decisions. I could not disagree more. It is in the nature of a bureaucracy to be both risk averse and to support the status quo. The simple truth is that there are times when the United States must be both open to new ideas and willing to take risks. One example of this willingness to take risks and push the envelope was the development of the Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV). Without earmarks, the Predator never would have made it off of the drawing board. Today, it is deployed in numerous theaters. Its ability to target terrorists without putting U.S. lives at risk has been demonstrated again and again. We will never know how many lives, both military and civilian, have been saved by the Predator, but we do know that without earmarks, we absolutely would not have this valuable weapon at our disposal.

“A second example is the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii. Opponents of Congressional spending initiatives consider funding for the East-West Center as an earmark. The Center, which was established in 1960, is recognized nationally and internationally for its ability to strengthen relations and understanding among the peoples and nations of Asia, the Pacific, and the United States. Providing funding for this Center is one example of how Congress, acting in accordance with the Constitution and in a proper exercise of its responsibilities, works to improve relations between the United States and some of our most important allies.

“There are numerous other examples of programs, facilities and infrastructure that have been created or funded through earmarks that have greatly benefited the American people, from supporting all of us with a stronger national defense to helping individual communities as they struggle to deal with crime, or homelessness, or a lack of vital services. I believe that a transparent earmarking process is of great benefit to this country. The problem is not earmarks, the problem is secrecy which led to abuses in the past. So let me again stress the steps we have taken to ensure a transparent process.

“Since the start of 2007, the Committee has identified all earmarks in Committee Reports, identified all recipients, and posted this information on the Internet.

“From the beginning of the 110th Congress in 2007, Congress has not only made the process more transparent and accountable, but also dramatically reduced funding levels for congressionally directed spending, which ballooned under Republican leadership from 1994-2006. As a result, in the Fiscal Year 2008, earmarks from non-project based accounts were reduced by 43 percent from levels approved by President Bush in 2006.

“At the beginning of the 111th Congress, Chairman Obey and I announced additional changes, including:

“Early Public Disclosure: To increase public scrutiny of committee decisions, earmark disclosure tables will be made publically available the same day as the House or Senate Subcommittee rather than Full Committee reports their bill or 24 hours before Full Committee consideration of appropriations legislation that has not been marked up by a Senate Subcommittee.

“Further Cuts: Earmarks will be further reduced to 50% of the 2006 level for non-project-based accounts. Earmarks will be held below 1% of discretionary spending in FY 2010 and in subsequent years.

“Today, we continue the process. As Chairman of the Appropriations Committee, I, along with my Vice Chairman, Senator Cochran, have sent a letter to every Senator that establishes additional safeguards to ensure even greater transparency in the oversight of congressionally directed spending items.

“The letter states that the Appropriations Committee will consider no Fiscal Year 2010 request for spending on congressionally directed items, as defined under Senate Rule XLIV, unless a description of the items proposed – including their purpose, location, the recipient of the funds and an explanation of why the spending is in the interest of the taxpayers – is made publicly available on the Senator’s office website at the time they submit their request to the Appropriations Committee. This requirement is in addition to the financial disclosure certification and other written statements already required under Senate Rule XLIV.

“The Committee will require that these requests be submitted 30 days prior to any mark-up, ensuring adequate time for all requests to be reviewed by the public. The Committee will also provide a central webpage where the public and the media will be able to access all of the requested earmarks.

“Furthermore, we will work to ensure that congressional earmarks for private companies are subject to the same rules and regulations for competition as apply to items submitted as part of the President’s budget.

“Finally, I note the President’s call for a return to regular order in the appropriations process. As Chairman of the Committee, I have made it clear that it is my intention to have all 12 regular appropriations bills go through Committee mark-up, be considered on the Senate Floor, go to a full Conference with the House, return to the Senate for a final vote, and be sent on to the President for his signature. This bipartisan process, in which Democrats and Republicans work together to produce a final product, is the tradition of the Appropriations Committee, and I intend for it to be the future of this Committee, as well.

“I believe the combination of strong earmark reform and the return to regular order will give the American people confidence that their tax dollars are being carefully spent. The appropriations process as a whole is working to make responsible investments that will strengthen our nation for generations to come. The reforms that we are implementing today will improve congressional and public oversight of the earmark process. As Chairman, I will work with the White House and Senate leadership to identify and put in place any additional changes which may be required to ensure complete accountability.”

###