

IOWA TRANSPARENCY NEWSLETTER



Earmarks: Lose-Lose for the Taxpayers

by Jennifer L. Crull

Earmarks are a very expensive part of the federal budget and a very difficult part of the budget to understand. In FY 2010, over \$15.9 billion was spent on earmarks.¹ You may wonder why earmarks are important to the issue of transparency. When you look at the amount of funds that are spent on earmarks every year and how most people have little to no idea where the money is going, this is the main reason we need transparency concerning earmarks until such time as they are eliminated. We have had heated debate and votes over trying to ban earmarks. One has to wonder why Congress is so opposed to bringing the light of day to something that they claim is in the best interest of the taxpayers. In order to understand this, we need to take a look at the numbers and amounts of earmarks that our Senators and Representatives rack up each year.

We like to believe that our elected officials are serving to the best of their ability and making decisions that are best for the citizens and taxpayers of this great country. Unfortunately that isn't always the case. If you look at Table One

Table One: Top Earmark Recipients (Joint), Senate

Member	Amount	Number
Thad Cochran (R-MS)	\$497,591,000	242
Daniel Inouye (D-HI)	\$392,432,850	158
Roger Wicker (R-MS)	\$368,039,000	163
Robert Byrd (D-WV)	\$292,014,000	96
Tom Harkin (D-IA)	\$267,589,200	194
Chuck Schumer (D-NY)	\$243,485,190	195
Carl Levin (D-MI)	\$243,133,400	215
Harry Reid (D-NV)	\$222,796,675	162
Patty Murray (D-WA)	\$219,538,750	187
Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)	\$211,298,500	158

Source: Taxpayers For Common Sense, http://taxpayer.net/user_uploads/file/Appropriations/FY2010/databases/Final/FY10bigkahunaanalysisfinal.pdf (Dec. 13, 2010)

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Table Two: Top Earmark Recipients (Solo), Senate

Member	Amount	Number
Robert Byrd (D-WV)	\$251,188,000	85
Daniel Inouye (D-HI)	\$204,953,950	66
Thad Cochran (R-MS)	\$102,418,000	72
Richard Shelby (R-AL)	\$100,550,000	34
Christopher Bond (R-MO)	\$95,335,000	62
Harry Reid (D-NV)	\$91,253,475	95
Tom Harkin (D-IA)	\$66,616,000	33
Mitch McConnell (R-KY)	\$60,189,000	38
Robert Bennett (R-UT)	\$58,910,000	30
Patrick Leahy (D-VT)	\$57,320,700	58

Source: Taxpayers For Common Sense, http://taxpayer.net/user_uploads/file/Appropriations/FY2010/databases/Final/FY10bigkahunaanalysisfinal.pdf (Dec. 13, 2010)

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Table Three: Earmark Recipients(Joint) Iowa House Members

Member	Rank	Amount	Number
Tom Latham (R-IA-4th)	28	\$66,190,000	54
Leonard Boswell (D-IA-3rd)	67	\$41,907,000	36
Dave Loebsack (D-IA-2nd)	82	\$35,109,000	31
Bruce Braley (D-IA-1st)	97	\$32,653,600	27
Steve King (R-IA-5th)	357	\$6,650,000	13

Source: Taxpayers For Common Sense,
http://taxpayer.net/user_uploads/file/Appropriations/FY2010/databases/Final/FY10bigkahunaanalysisfinal.pdf
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you will see the top ten recipients of earmarks in the Senate, along with the number of earmarks and the amount of all their earmarks. For Iowa, we see that Tom Harkin (D-IA) is number five, with 194 earmarks that total over \$267.5 million.² Charles Grassley (R-IA) had 136 earmarks that totaled \$161.2 million, which ranked him 20th overall.

Earmarks are a sign of how influential a member of Congress is. If we look at the number one Senator receiving earmarks, Thad Cochran (R-MS) has 242 earmarks that total over \$497.5 million.³ Additionally, the second highest Senator for earmarks is Daniel Inouye (D-HI) with 158 earmarks that total almost \$400 million. Another fact that you need to know is that Senator Inouye is the Chair of the Appropriations Committee and Senator Cochran is the Vice-Chair.⁴ The numbers that we looked at in Table One are earmarks that are a result of joint sponsorship of funding. If you look at Table Two, it shows the top ten members who obtained earmarks with solo sponsorship. As you can see from this table, Tom Harkin is still in the top ten.

When we look at the earmarks from the House, no one from Iowa is in the top ten. In looking at Table Three, you will see all of Iowa's Representatives. Tom

Latham (R-IA-4th) is Iowa's top Representative for earmarks. Latham secured 54 earmarks by himself and with other members that totaled \$66.1 million.⁵ Even if you look at the top Representative for earmarks you would see that Bill Young (R-FL-10th) had 63 earmarks totaling \$128.5 million, less than one-third than the highest in the Senate.⁶ It is easy to see who is in control of the purse strings.

The last bit of data I would like to share with you is the total number of earmarks that the state of Iowa received in FY 2010. Overall, Iowa received 189 earmarks that totaled \$163.9 million, which ranks us 24th. When we break this down per capita, the picture changes. Iowa received \$54.51 per capita in FY 2010, which ranked us 16th.⁷ This number doesn't seem as high when we compare Iowa to the top state per capita, which is Hawaii. That state's earmarks per capita is \$318.26; it is on the "gravity train."⁸

Do you have any idea what those projects are that were funded by the earmarks around our state? Table Four shows the top 20 funded projects in the state based on amount. As you review this list, some make sense with the use of funds; others make you stop and ask why? These question-

Table Four: Top 20 Earmarks in Iowa

Description	City	State	Bill	Final Amount
Missouri River Fish Mitigation, IA, KS, MO, MT, NE, ND & SD		IA; KS; MO; MT; ND; NE; SD	Energy and Water	\$56,686,000
Upper Mississippi River Restoration, IL, IA, MN, MO & WI		IA; IL; MN; MO; WI	Energy and Water	\$16,470,000
Iowa Department of Education, Des Moines, IA, to continue the Harkin Grant program	Des Moines	IA	Labor-HHS-Education	\$7,287,000
Multi-Utility Materials for Future Combat Systems		FL; IA; SD	Defense	\$7,200,000
Missouri River--Rulo to Mouth, IA, NE, KS & MO		IA; KS; MO; NE	Energy and Water	\$6,500,000
Upper Mississippi River--Illinois WW System, IL, IA, MN, MO & WI		IA; IL; MN; MO; WI	Energy and Water	\$6,276,000
Midwest Counter-Drug Training Center	Johnston	IA	Defense	\$6,000,000
SOAR Virtual School District	Cedar Falls	IA	Defense	\$6,000,000
Integrated Manifold and Tube Ceramic Oxygen Generator	Davenport	IA	Defense	\$4,800,000
New Vaccines to Fight Respiratory Disease and Central Nervous Disorders	Ames	IA	Defense	\$4,800,000
Saylorville Lake, IA		IA	Energy and Water	\$4,615,000
Alteration to Security Forces Facility	Des Moines	IA	Military Construction	\$4,600,000
Missouri River, ND, MT, SD, NE, IA, KS & MO		IA; KS; MO; MT; ND; NE; SD	Energy and Water	\$4,483,000
Ultra Light Utility Vehicles for the National Guard	Medina	IA; MN	Defense	\$4,480,000
Des Moines Recreational River and Greenbelt, IA		IA	Energy and Water	\$4,062,000
Red Rock Dam and Lake Red Rock, IA		IA	Energy and Water	\$4,056,000
Fort Madison, IA		IA	Homeland Security	\$4,000,000
Portable Rapid Bacterial Warfare Detection Unit	Ames	IA	Defense	\$4,000,000
Single Generator Operations Lithium Ion Battery		IA; NV	Defense	\$4,000,000
US Property and Fiscal Office (Camp Dodge)		IA	Military Construction	\$4,000,000

Source: Taxpayers for Common Sense Excel File, http://taxpayer.net/search_by_category.php?action=view&proj_id=2789&category=type=Project (Dec. 13, 2010)

able ones include the earmarks for education that were in a defense funding bill.⁹

So, with some of the “gravy train” coming to our state, why should we look at ending earmarks? The answer is simple. The National Taxpayers Union best described the role of the earmark process in a press release from March “as a cesspool of wasteful spending and corruption.”¹⁰ Even President Obama called last month to ban earmarks. During one of his addresses in November, he stated

that “we can’t afford [earmarks]” and that “these are items inserted into spending bills by members of Congress without adequate review.”¹¹ The President summed up how many taxpayers feel with this statement: “When it comes to signaling our commitment to fiscal responsibility, addressing them would have an important impact.”¹²

With that said though, Senate Democrats worked relentlessly to pass a \$1.1 trillion omnibus spending bill with 1,924 pages

that set aside funding for over 6,000 earmarks. Fortunately, that bill has been dropped.¹³ While I know the people involved feel that these are worthy projects, it is hard to argue that the federal government needs your tax dollars because it wants to help fund a waterway transportation museum when we have continued record high unemployment.¹⁴ Instead, our government needs to make hard decisions and cut spending. That was the resounding message sent by the voters in November.

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While earmarks are allowed to continue in any form, there will be winners and losers. But the biggest loser is the taxpayer because wherever the money is sent, all taxpayers will be paying the price. With the corruption we have seen in Congress because of earmarks, it is time to end them for all the citizens to be winners. When the House is back in session in the New Year, the House Republicans have a pledge to end earmarks. Let's hope that New Year's Resolution lasts! Plus, let's hope to see some action from the Senate and President Obama concerning this issue.

Endnotes:

¹ "TCS FY 2010 Earmark Analysis: Apples-To-Apples Increase in Earmarks Totals," Taxpayers for Common Sense, November 30, 2009, p. 1, <http://taxpayer.net/search_by_category.

<http://taxpayer.net/search_by_category.php?action=view&proj_id=2655&category=Earmarks&type=Project> (December 13, 2010).

² Ibid.

³ Excel File of all Earmarks for the FY 2010 Federal Budget, Taxpayers for Common Sense, November 30, 2009, <http://taxpayer.net/search_by_category.php?action=view&proj_id=2789&category=&type=Project> (December 13, 2010).

⁴ United State Senate Committee on Appropriations, <<http://appropriations.senate.gov/>> (December 15, 2010).

⁵ Excel File of all Earmarks for the FY 2010 Federal Budget, Taxpayers for Common Sense, November 30, 2009, <http://taxpayer.net/search_by_category.php?action=view&proj_id=2789&category=&type=Project> (December 13, 2010).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Taxpayer Group Applauds House Republicans for Enacting Earmark Moratorium," Press Release, National

Taxpayers Union, March 11, 2010, <<http://www.ntu.org/news-and-issues/government-reform/earmarks/applauds-house-gop-earmark-moratorium.html>> (December 15, 2010).

¹¹ "Remarks of President Barack Obama, Weekly Address, November 13, 2010" The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/13/weekly-address-president-obama-calls-earmark-reform>> (December 14, 2010).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Brian Riedl, "Updated: Senate Omnibus Bill: Nearly 2,000 Pages of Runaway Spending and Pork," The Foundry, December 15, 2010, <<http://blog.heritage.org/2010/12/15/senate-omnibus-bill-nearly-2000-pages-of-runaway-spending-and-pork/>> (December 15, 2010).

¹⁴ Ibid.

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