

Earmark This Bad Argument

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With President Trump endorsing a return to earmarks, House Republicans too are reportedly “reconsidering” their usefulness and pondering “how they might ease back into the practice.”

Lawmakers fret that they have lost too much power by giving up this instrument of corruption. (Not their characterization.)

Wikipedia defines “earmark” as a budgetary provision that “directs funds to a specific recipient while circumventing the merit-based or [competitive] allocation process.” An earmark is a taxpayer-funded goodie bestowed



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on a congressman’s constituent, the sort of crony willing to contribute to the bestower’s next election campaign in return.

Quid pro quo, pay-for-play, bribery. Whatever you call it, there’s darn good reason why political leaders who fight corruption have fought to end earmarks.

Congressional Republicans imposed a ban on earmarks in 2011 to show that they were anti-corruption. So why relapse? Well, “the time is right,” according to GOP Representative John Culberson, for Congress to prove it can use earmarks responsibly. His bad argument is that the “excesses” of a decade ago were committed by “knuckleheads [who] went overboard.”

Somebody alert Culberson to the fact that many of the same knuckleheads are still in office. Ahem. Congress is not yet term-limited, remember?

The more basic point is that earmarks are by nature corrosive of sound government. President Trump’s only metric is apparently “getting [things] done” as opposed to obstructionism, preferring “the great friendliness” when we had earmarks. Sure, stuff got done — a lot more spending, a lot more *bad* stuff.

To the extent they’re gone, earmarks should *stay* gone. The only appropriate action is to make it even harder to bring them back.

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.