

✓ OPENTHEBOOKS OVERSIGHT REPORT

EARMARKS

RETURN OF THE SWAMP CREATURES

*Mapping \$16 Billion in
Congressional Earmarks FY2023*



PROLOGUE

"Restoring earmarks in today's Congress would be like opening a bar tab for a bunch of recovering alcoholics."

U.S. SENATOR TOM COBURN, 2014

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

PORK. PET PROJECTS. LEGAL BRIBERY. FLEECING. SLEAZE. BRIDGE TO NOWHERE. LOGROLLING. SPENDING SMORGASBORD. BACON. CURRENCY OF CORRUPTION IN CONGRESS. FAVOR FACTORY.

Those are just some of the words and phrases used to describe earmarks.

Banned for a decade, earmarks returned on a bi-partisan basis when 158 House Republicans took a secret vote to join Pelosi Democrats. Cheering them on was The Brookings Institution - the largest center-left think tank who published the white paper "The Case For Corruption - Why Washington Needs Honest Graft."

Earmarks allow federal legislators to set aside specific sums of money for local projects in their states or districts. Earmarks help members of Congress "bring home the bacon."

In the 2000s, members were being indicted, convicted, and serving jail sentences for corrupt earmarking. Infamously, Randy "Duke" Cunningham (R-CA), a bona fide Naval fighter pilot ace, was convicted for doling out earmarks and collecting bribes including a yacht, Rolls Royce, and Louis-Philippe commode.

By embracing earmarks, Republicans fumbled the first opportunity to distinguish themselves from big-spending Democrats.

Speaker Kevin McCarthy doesn't request earmarks himself but allowed a secret caucus vote to bring them back.

It's time for a public, on-the-record, up or down vote on earmarks in the United States House of Representatives.

WHO WE ARE

American Transparency (OpenTheBooks.com) is a public charity. We do not accept government money. Our oversight reports present hard data so citizens, media, think tanks, politicians, and watchdogs can "follow the money." Hard facts are non-partisan and enhance the public discourse.

TOP 10 TAKEAWAYS

1. CONGRESS EARMARKED 7,509 PROJECTS FOR \$16,012,272,565 paid for by taxpayers within the Consolidated Appropriations Act 2023 (H.R. 2617) and signed by President Joe Biden on December 29, 2022.

Interactive Map: We [mapped each earmark by state across America on our interactive map](#) – just click a pin (state capitol) and scroll down to see the earmarks in the chart beneath the map.



2. SENATE REPUBLICANS GO HOG WILD FOR EARMARKS

MEMBER OF CONGRESS	EARMARK AMOUNT
SEN. SHELBY (R-AL)	\$656,406,000
SEN. INHOFE (R-OK)	\$510,520,000
SEN. MURKOWSKI (R-AK)	\$489,632,000
SENS. HIRONO, SCHATZ (D-HI)	\$421,560,000
SEN. BLUNT (R-MO)	\$350,056,000
REP. WEBER (R-TX)	\$287,537,000
SEN. GRAHAM (R-SC)	\$262,134,000
SEN. LEAHY (D-VT)	\$212,525,000
SEN. CASSIDY (R-LA)	\$204,735,000
SENS. COLLINS, KING (R-ME)	\$200,057,000

Seven of the top ten Members of Congress who earmarked the most were Republicans and the top three earmarked **\$1.656 billion**.

3. IN FACT, CONGRESSIONAL REPUBLICANS out-earmarked their Democratic colleagues **in 21 states** including Texas, Florida, Missouri, Oklahoma, Maine, and South Carolina.

4. OVERALL, DEMOCRATS EARMARKED \$9.1 BILLION, REPUBLICANS \$6.4 BILLION and a bipartisan group of legislators earmarked an additional \$476 million.

5. THE WHEEL OF EARMARK FORTUNE included:

- \$1M for the Macadamia Nut Health Initiative
- \$2M for the National Great Blacks In Wax Museum
- \$3M to turn Pittsburgh into Hollywood
- Nearly \$4M for seven buses in Wauwatosa
- \$5M to the Ozark Empire Fairgrounds
- \$6M to institutions where their spouses work!



6. \$10 MILLION TO HOST ARCHIVES: Despite new rules prohibiting self-dealing, retiring U.S. Senators earmarked \$10 million for institutions to host their archives. Then, at least three of those top earmarking senators sent tens of millions of dollars more on more earmarks to those same institutions (that are already paid to host their archives).

7. ROADS, BRIDGES, STREETS, AVENUES, AND HIGHWAYS rendered only \$1.6 billion in earmarks – resulting in only \$1 in every \$10 earmark dollars. Furthermore, many of the “infrastructure” projects touted by Republicans were phase II or phase III projects. Phase I was funded locally.

8. LOCAL PROJECTS OF MERIT SHOULD BE FUNDED LOCALLY

With earmarks, federal taxpayers paid for:

- \$1M splash pad in Center Line, MI
- \$2.5M for landscaping the road medians in La Mirada, CA
- \$3.6M for phase II of the Michelle Obama trail in Atlanta, GA
- \$4M to renovate a theatre in Dallas, TX
- \$7M to create a brand new National Korean Museum in Los Angeles, CA

9. RICH INSTITUTIONS FREQUENTLY RECEIVED EARMARKS.

Examples include:

- Ivy League’s Columbia University (\$3 million) | Endowment: \$13.3 billion
- Field Museum of Chicago (\$3.5 million) | Assets: \$600 million | CEO pay: \$1.1 million
- New York Botanical Gardens (\$1 million) | CEO pay: \$1.4 million (latest year available)

10. SECRET VOTE TO BRING BACK EARMARKS

Banned for a decade, House Republicans took a secret vote to join Democrats to bring back earmarks. There were 158 Republicans who embraced “the currency of corruption in Congress” – earmarks as a spending tool.