

## March 24, 2009 - Murtha: The Truth About Congressional Earmarks

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Truth About Congressional Earmarks

By Rep. John P. Murtha (PA-12)

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Congress is the branch of our government that is closest to the American people, and our elected representatives are entrusted by the Constitution with the power of the purse.

The current uproar inside Washington over the issue of Congressional earmarks, which comprise less than one percent of the federal budget, is a distraction from the real problems and challenges we face. As has often been the case, the reality and facts get blurred within the arguments and stories.

Earmarks do not increase the federal budget, they direct funds within the budget for certain community projects or programs. If these funds are not directed by members of Congress, decisions would be left for Washington bureaucrats in various federal agencies to decide what is best for our local communities.

I believe that elected representatives of the people understand their constituents and districts best.

Earmarks have brought jobs, economic development, infrastructure, vital services, and community improvements to our region. There was a time when economic growth came to a standstill because our region lacked the availability of sewage and water infrastructure. Because of earmarks, hundreds-of-millions of dollars in federal funds have been used to expand or replace local sewage and water lines, including current projects in Armstrong, Fayette, Somerset, and Washington Counties. Because of earmarks, 85 of our local police departments received grants for equipment and vehicles this month. Because of earmarks, we will open a new National Guard Readiness Center in Waynesburg later this year to replace the current 93-year old armory. The ongoing expansion of US Route 22 to a four-lane highway, and the completion of the intermodal facility in New Stanton came about because of earmarks.

Furthermore, there are countless examples where earmarks have greatly benefited the American people and have saved tax dollars. The Penn State Electro-Optics Center, in Armstrong County, has documented over \$1 billion in savings for the Defense Department in just the past few years. Johnstown's DRS Technologies has saved the Navy, through an earmark, over \$1.2 billion on a single program. The National Center for Defense Manufacturing and Machining, in Latrobe, has saved the Defense Department nearly \$500 million in manufacturing costs.

I have always said that my ideas come from you. I rely on our local officials and County Commissioners to tell me what they need to create jobs and further economic growth. My office receives thousands of earmark requests each year, and every request is properly reviewed and vetted through a lengthy and thorough process. In the end, we only recommend funding those that are cost-effective and provide a worthy service or product to the taxpayer.

Also, under the Democratic Congress we have made good on our promise to reduce the amount of earmarks by 40 percent and to increase transparency. In the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, which I Chair, we have cut earmarks by \$3.6 billion over 2006 levels. And since 2007, all earmarks are identified in spending bills and members of Congress must certify that they have no financial interest in their request.

National Journal Magazine said in a recent column that, "Earmark spending today is, if anything, more transparent, more accountable, and more promptly disclosed than is non-earmark spending." The "non-earmark spending" they are referring to is when Washington bureaucrats, not elected representatives, decide how to spend your tax dollars.

This is the truth about Congressional earmarks, the facts that are too often ignored by critics of the lawmaking process.

My job is to represent the people who elected me to serve. I don't apologize for directing federal funds to western Pennsylvania, nor do I apologize for trying to improve the quality of life in our region. That's my job.