

A better way for earmarks?

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Like a vampire stalking Capitol Hill, earmarks never die. Despite public vilification and pious promises in Washington to stop the blood-sucking, the omnibus spending bill the [Senate](#) is considering to keep the government operating includes \$8 billion in earmarks.

That's a minuscule portion of the \$1.1-trillion bill, but earmarks have come to

symbolize all that's wrong with spending in Washington. They aren't. Earmarks aren't necessarily bad or wasteful. Lawmakers know their districts' needs best and should be able to direct some money as they see fit. Earmarks allow them to do that, but maybe there's a better way.

[Congress](#) should consider appropriating some reasonable amount of money for earmarks in the federal budget, and then dividing that pot equally among House members. That would be fairer, more equitable and more transparent than the current system, which relies on backroom wheeling-and-dealing and favors those with congressional clout.

Washington spent \$19.6 billion via earmarks in 2009. But according to a [Cato Institute](#) analysis, New York, which paid 8.2 percent of federal taxes that year, got only 2.1 percent of the earmarked funds. Thirty-four other states also gave more than they got. Equal shares would end that disparity.

Of course when you're talking government and money, there's always the potential for waste and corruption. No matter how the money is apportioned, there would still need to be strict rules dictating the types of projects and programs that could be funded. And maximum transparency would still be an absolute must.

Earmarks aren't inherently evil. But they should be more egalitarian. hN

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