

# Obama Already Retreating From Earmarks Promise

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In last night's State of the Union, president Obama took a page out of the Republican playbook. Obama said, "If a bill comes to my desk with earmarks inside, I will veto it." Seems straightforward enough.

In fact, it is something that Congressional Republicans have been doing since March. As then-Whip Eric Cantor wrote in an op-ed last October,

"House Republicans took an unprecedented stand in March, imposing an immediate moratorium on earmarks for the remainder of the Congress. Yet, because the governing rules of one Congress cannot bind the next, this moratorium will expire on Jan. 3, 2011. I do not believe that should be allowed to happen.

The next Republican Conference should immediately move to eliminate earmarks. Should Republicans be elected as the majority party, I believe that we should extend the moratorium to the entire House – to Democrats and Republicans alike. And I encourage President Barack Obama and the White House to take a similar step."

President Obama's comments in the State of the Union suggest he is ready to do just that as part of a "government that lives within its means."

Not surprisingly, Democrats were furious. As Politico reported immediately after Obama's speech,

After Obama surprised lawmakers in his State of the Union address with a bold threat to veto all bills with earmarks, Democrats in the Senate grew visibly frustrated, denouncing the president's call as a power grab that'll have little-to-no impact on the federal budget deficit.

Perhaps the most vocal critic of President Obama's plan was Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid. Reid told reporters yesterday, "I think this is an issue that any president would like to have, that takes power away from the legislative branch of government. I think it's the wrong thing to do. I don't think it's helpful. It's a lot of pretty talk."

Apparently, the White House couldn't stand the heat coming from his own party. Just hours after making his no-earmarks pledge, President Obama was already attempting to qualify his statements. As Jim Harper of the Cato Institute just reported,

A "government reform factsheet" circulated by White House staff says, "The President intends to veto bills with special interest earmarks ." (emphasis added) This appears to create a class of earmarks that will bring the president's veto, special interest earmarks, and a class that will not—national interest earmarks, one supposes.

This just goes to show that President Obama isn't truly interested in changing the spending culture of Washington. He's interested in sounding like a moderate who is willing to follow Republican ideas, but in reality continues to act like a free-spending liberal. Sadly, it appears Harry Reid was right on the money when he said that Obama's pledge was just "a lot of pretty talk." Well Mr. President, as the 2012 president elections near, remember that actions speak louder than words.