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McConnell Caves on Earmark Ban Under Pressure From Tea Party

By *ELSPETH REEVE* | November 16, 2010 12:04pm



Mitch McConnell has caved to pressure from Tea Partiers and signed on to the activists' moratorium on earmarks. The move is an "abrupt reversal," The Washington Post's [Shailagh Murray](#) reports, given that only last week, McConnell was staunchly defending the practice because it doesn't increase the federal budget deficit all that much.

Few Republicans were willing to make that case with the Senate minority leader, however. Tea Party favorites like Sen. Jim DeMint are "emboldened," Murray reports. On Monday, Sen. Tom Coburn said he would force his colleagues to vote on the earmark moratorium. By the end of the day, 27 GOP senators came out in favor of the ban.

- **An Indication of Tea Party Power**, [Ezra Klein](#) argues at The Washington Post. "The big news here is not earmarks, however, which are, as McConnell says, 'small or even symbolic things,' but the glimpse into the dynamics of the incoming Republican legislators. Jim DeMint and the conservative base hold a lot of influence. At this point, it's not yet clear that McConnell and the Republican establishment -- many of whom were defeated in primaries over the course of the election -- can counter them. Some have warned that will lead to civil war in the Republican Party, but it could also lead to an exhausted capitulation by the old guard -- much as we saw from McConnell yesterday. If that happens, if the moderating influence of the veterans is not just rejected but actively extinguished, we're going to see a much more ideologically hardline and legislatively unpredictable Republican Conference than most have been predicting."
- **No, This Is a Return to GOP Roots**, [Roger Pilon](#) argues at Cato. "Far from a sign that 'establishment' Republicans are 'caving in' to the Tea Party faction soon to arrive here," McConnell's announcement "suggests that Republicans may be rediscovering their roots in limited government... McConnell calls for congressional oversight 'to monitor how the money taxpayers send to the administration is actually spent.' Far more important will be hearings to determine whether Congress has constitutional authority to appropriate money on any particular matter in the first place." Pilon continues, "the new Congress needs to see through the false alternative the earmarks debate has engendered. At bottom, it's not a question of whether Congress or the president shall decide. Rather, after administration input, all but ministerial spending decisions belong to Congress — as

constrained by the Constitution. "

- **The Tea Party Is Gloating**, [David Weigel](#) observes. The Tea Party Patriots are celebrating McConnell's flip flop on Facebook, crediting their campaign of phone calls to freshman members of Congress. Member Debbie Dooley emailed Weigel, "Last week McConnell said that he would oppose earmarks. Now over the weekend, he has changed his mind. Just might have something to do with the unending phone calls the freshmen received. He did not want that unleashed on him and other Senators. Bet the vote will be almost unanimous..."
- **Pork Matters**, [Patterico](#) explains. "Before he was dragged kicking and screaming into supporting an earmark ban, Mitch McConnell and a lot of the Smart People were arguing that a ban on earmarks does not reduce spending by a single penny. ... Can one of the Smart People explain this logic to me? The argument I have seen is that eliminating earmarks simply turns over spending power to the executive." But if lawmakers reject a stupid earmark, the president doesn't get to decide how to spend it, Patterico writes. And besides, the goal is cutting spending. "As for the size of earmarks, it's true that they are a small part of the budget. But it's symptomatic of the mindset."
- **This Is Small Ball**, [Chuck Todd](#), [Mark Murray](#), [Domenico Montanaro](#), and [Ali Weinberg](#) write at First Read. "More than two years ago at the first presidential debate, John McCain brought up his crusade against earmarks, and Barack Obama easily knocked it down." But since then, McCain's cause has become bipartisan. "But this drive to eliminate earmarks brings up Obama's criticism from 2008: It's so ... small, especially compared with the price tag of extending the Bush tax cuts (for the wealthy or the middle class) and what the deficit-reduction co-chairs recently proposed (tax increases, spending cuts, entitlement reform). It also raises this question: If senators or members of Congress are no longer in charge of bringing home the bacon to their states or districts (via earmarks or another mechanism), then what becomes their primary mission? Being ideological fighters? And then there's this: By banning earmarks, is Congress ceding all the bacon authority to the executive branch?"
- **One Overlooked But Important Factor on the Earmark Vote**, [Teagan Goddard](#) points out, is that, "It's a non-binding resolution."

Sources

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