

## **Senator Coburn Introductory Statement for the Earmark Transparency Act of 2010**

Mr. President, today I, along with three colleagues from both sides of the aisle, introduced the Earmark Transparency Act of 2010. This legislation answers the President's call for Congress to create a single, searchable database of all congressional earmark requests.

Over the years, many raised concerns about the problems and the role of earmarks in the federal budget. Personally, I have repeatedly stated that earmarks are a "gateway drug" to spending addiction and that the process has gotten so out of control we have effectively handed the keys of the U.S. Treasury over to Washington special interests.

Let's be clear of why further reform is important. Americans want to end the corrupting influence of earmarks. They want special interests purged from the spending process. They want the practice of trading votes for earmarks to end, and they want the process of trading campaign dollars for earmarks to end. From Bridges to Nowhere to the Cornhusker Kickback, Americans are tired of Washington using hard-earned taxpayer funding on items that fall short of urgent national priorities, and they want to lift the shroud of secrecy over how spending decisions are made.

Without a doubt, there have been significant strides in bringing the system of earmarking under control and into the sunlight. Earmark requests are better disclosed, most approved earmarks are now written into legislation, and by and large total cost and number of projects are lower than they were from a few years ago. Yet, in FY 2010, Congress approved more 9,000 earmarks costing taxpayers at least \$16 billion.

Today, we will launch an effort to bring about a new era of transparency to the earmarks. Together with Senators Gillibrand, Feingold and McCain, we are introducing the Earmark Transparency Act of 2010.

This proposal answers the challenge made by President Obama during the State of the Union earlier this year. In the address, the President called on Congress to go even further.

"I'm also calling on Congress to continue down the path of earmark reform. Democrats and Republicans. You've trimmed some of this spending, you've embraced some meaningful change. But restoring the public trust demands more. For example, some members of Congress post some earmark requests online. Tonight, I'm calling on Congress to publish all earmark requests on a single Web site before there's a vote, so that the American people can see how their money is being spent."

I fully agree. To restore trust, the public demands that we do more. Our proposal is straightforward. It creates a one-stop shop database where citizens can go to view every lawmaker's earmark requests, as well as those projects ultimately approved and signed into law.

If we do not put these increased disclosure provisions into law, earmarks will continue to be the currency of big government, utilized by powerful lawmakers to bribe members into voting for bills they may otherwise oppose.

The Earmark Transparency Act of 2010 would do the following:

**Create a user-friendly, online database** – it would allow citizens to sort, search and download earmark data;

**Provide details on projects that are not currently available** – it would include all relevant information, including the amount of initial request, amount approved by the committee, amount approved in final legislation, sponsor name, sponsor state or district, project name, and other relevant information;

**Allow the public to see what Congress sees** – The bill would require the website to include the earmark request letter written by a member of Congress and any documents supporting the request that is sent to a congressional committee; and

**Make information available quicker** – it would, consistent with the President's speech, require all requested earmarks that are approved to be made public before a vote.

While some of this information exists on various websites of a few elected officials, this effort would put all the information in one central location. With a simple click of a button, any citizen would be able to learn everything they want to know about how elected officials are spending their money.

The simple principle underlying this legislation is that we need more sunlight to shine on our great system. The brighter the sunlight, the more our great democracy will flourish.