



UNITED STATES SENATOR ★ SERVING THE CITIZENS OF IDAHO

LARRY CRAIG

NEWS RELEASE

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Dan Whiting (202) 224-8078
Sid Smith (208) 342-7985

Sunny Days Ahead by Senator Larry Craig

Our representative republic depends on an informed electorate, and the more transparent the decisions and actions of elected officials are, the more information voters have to make an informed choice on Election Day. Transparency also has an uncanny ability to keep people honest. As former Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis observed, “Sunshine is the best disinfectant.”

Over the past couple of years, prosecutors and the media have brought to light a number of corrupt Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle. Consequently, corruption has dominated the discussion among voters, and much of that discussion has centered on Congressional “earmarks” in legislation. That discussion has raised a call for accountability – sunshine on the process, if you will.

I couldn’t agree more. One area where reform is urgently needed is the budget and appropriations process. A few bad actors have made it clear that Congress must foster a culture of transparency and accountability. I have long advocated that a clear, simple, fair process is the only kind we should use when determining how taxpayer money is spent. However, I also believe the responsibility for making those determinations should remain with Congress, as written in the Constitution.

Last year I voluntarily took steps to further highlight what I do for Idaho. I now provide on my website a list of every project I have secured through the appropriations process since I began serving on the Appropriations Committee in 1997. I invite you to view this list by visiting my Idaho Initiatives page at <http://craig.senate.gov/idinit.cfm>. I believe I am the only Senator to provide a list like this.

Some have argued that Members of Congress should not be able to obtain federal support for specific projects in their states. I disagree. As Idaho’s Senator, a big part of my job is to work to make sure that Idaho’s critical needs are met. Each year, hundreds of Idaho counties, towns, hospitals, universities, and others come to me to ask for help in addressing critical needs in their communities. Examples include drinking and wastewater infrastructure, university research, roads, airports, activities at the Idaho National Laboratory, and more.

I have very strict criteria and a rigorous screening process I use when evaluating these needs before I am willing to present my case to Congress. I take my stewardship over taxpayer dollars very seriously, and will only support projects that truly address critical needs in Idaho. Consequently, I am proud of every project I have worked to support.

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Projects funded by Congress should be subject to the same rigorous process Rep. Simpson and I have always used. The incoming Chairmen of the Appropriations Committees for the next Congress have pledged to “restore an accountable, above-board, transparent process for funding decisions and put an end to the abuses that have harmed the credibility of Congress.” I join them in making that pledge.

A related concern on many Americans’ minds is federal spending. Unfortunately, earmark reform isn’t going to tame federal spending. These funds are already included in the budget; earmarking simply shifts the decision on where to spend money from federal agency bureaucrats in Washington to elected representatives – representatives who know and understand the critical needs of their states and districts.

Accountability and transparency in the process will help, but there’s much more to the story. The real problem is that two-thirds of each year's federal budget is eaten up by “mandatory spending.” This type of spending includes programs such as Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid, and farm, poverty, and some veterans programs. Spending on these programs has catapulted out of control, and I fear this problem won’t be reined in by a majority in Congress until it is a crisis.

Fiscal responsibility and integrity will continue to be centerpieces of my work for Idaho in Congress. It started when I came to Congress and fathered the Balanced Budget Amendment, and has continued through my commitment to being accountable and transparent in all that I do. In this upcoming Congress I will work to shine even more sunlight on the process and to keep spending and taxes low.

It is an ambitious goal, but one I hope we can achieve. Our future depends on it.