

by forming an openly disclosed marketplace where people begin to compete once again for each other's business. This is important. It is essential not because I say so, but because the people that I represent say so and, as I mentioned earlier, the Comptroller General agrees.

Everyone in this House, every Member of Congress in the Senate and the House has a health care story to tell. I can share that with you nonconfidentially because they come up to me on the floor and ask me about their health.

□ 1700

They ask me about the pills they are taking. And I am here, I am available, and I can't bill them because, well, I have taken an oath. I only get paid by the people I represent.

The fact is everybody has a health care story to tell. We have to make certain that we don't discriminate against people based on their political affiliation, be they independent, Democrat, or Republican, but by the condition that they are a citizen and they ought to be involved in the risk pool.

Mr. Speaker, I will close my remarks on health care by suggesting very strongly that every Member of Congress consider this. Either you are for discrimination and on the side of the insurance industry or you are against it and you are on the side of the consumer, the patients, and the millions and millions of Americans who need health insurance at prices they can afford to pay.

It was said first in the White House several years ago, either you are with us or you are against us. But this bill allows everybody in the House to decide whose side are you on. Whose side are you on? Are you sitting in the boardroom with the CEOs of the insurance company or are you sitting at home at the kitchen table with mothers and fathers who are struggling to pay their bills every month?

In my State of Wisconsin, and it is true across the United States, the most common reason that people go bankrupt today is they go bankrupt because they cannot afford their health care bills. They cannot afford this. In Shawano County several months ago when I stopped into the county courthouse, I was told that 19 out of 20 families who had come through an education policy after going bankrupt did so only because they couldn't afford their health care bills. We can and we must do better in America. And it starts by reforming our health care system. When we drive down the cost of health care, we are going to cut taxes for everyone. Now this sounds like it is voodoo economics, but if I lower the cost of doing business for every city, every county, every town, every State in the country by lowering health care costs, I can reduce your taxes. This is not just a health care issue. It is a business issue. It is a tax issue.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to share with you some words I was privileged to listen to in a small town in the northern part of Wisconsin, a district I have the honor and privilege of representing. It is a city called Niagara, Wisconsin. And as Niagara goes, so goes our Nation. Niagara is a small town of 1,880 people. And the major employer there is a paper mill, which was recently purchased and then closed. Three hundred twenty jobs in this small town are about to disappear in April. And I went to Niagara to interview some people and listen to their concerns to see what government can do to help them. I spoke with George. George is nearly 80 years old. I would like to share with you his words for our country. They will be available, if not today, then tomorrow at my congressional Web site, Kagan.house.gov, as a video clip.

I asked George, "Are you still working?" And George responded, "Nope, I'm retired 19 years. Put 41-plus years in there. But what I want to say is that Congress should have been aware of this happening because it has been in all the union papers." And he is referring to the closing of the mill, the one major employer in town. "People been talking about it. They put one or two paper machines out of there. They pulled the machines out. And what do they do? They ship the machine to India. That machine was 100 years old, and now it is operating in India. So why was Congress so lax? All these jobs been deteriorating right along."

And I asked him, "How long have you lived here?" He responded, "All my life."

"You were born right here?"

"Yup. I will be 80 years in April. And I have five brothers who worked in the paper mill also, 41, 42, 45, they all worked there that long. And my children during the summer months worked in that mill."

I asked him, "What did you do in the mill?"

"I worked on the paper machines."

"Which one?"

"I worked on them all, all machines. Started off in the old mill, number one, went to number two, and then went to number three, and then to number four"

"And do they have any retirements," I asked him, "at the mill?"

"I have very good benefits, and I am thankful for that. That is what I am worried about now, though. I was told that at the end of 2008, things are going to change. I am going to have to get something else. I don't know that. Nobody told me that. But that is just the rumor. So we have to start looking into something else." He is referring to health care benefits and the prescription pills.

"What makes me mad is that we found out we can get medication in Minnesota and in Canada. And what happens? They tell me I can't do it no more because we would get sued, the company would get sued. They would

save the mill about \$300 every 3 months, and we would save ourselves \$250 every 3 months. And they said, 'No, we can't do it,' so now we have to buy them at Wal-Mart."

And I asked him, "So you think there is a better way of doing things?"

"You better believe it." I asked him then at the end of my conversation if there is anything else he would like Congress to hear? If he were talking then with Congress and with President Bush, what would he have to say, what would you ask him to do.

And George responded, "Get on the ball. Take care of the United States, not foreign countries. They always said foreign countries are going to take us from within. They don't have to fight a war with us. Well, that is what is happening right now. They are buying up all the United States."

George had it right. We have to be able to take care of our own people. I represent people in Wisconsin, not foreign nations. And taking care of people in Wisconsin means, first of all, guarantying them access to health care that they can afford, high-quality care that is delivered right close to home. And how can we do that? How can we afford to continue to pay for those costs when our jobs are being shipped overseas?

So, Mr. Speaker, as a close this evening, I would like everyone to begin to think differently in America. Health care is intimately tied up with our employment opportunities, with our jobs. We need higher wage jobs that will sustain America and provide living wages, a living wage that can afford health care. Health care is intimately involved with our jobs and also with our environment and the education of our children. You can't unwrap all of these problems. They are all stuck together. But the single greatest problem we face today is our health care crisis. And by submitting this bill for passage today, the No Discrimination Health in Insurance Act, I hope to lay the first brick in the new wall for the foundation of the House of Health Care. We have to begin to think differently in America, and hopefully that starts today.

BIPARTISAN EARMARK REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, the need for earmark reform should be an issue that we can all agree upon, a bipartisan agreement. As reported last week, Congress' approval rating fell to just 22 percent. Will the House sit idly by patting each other on the back as this issue continues to grow and be one that the American people care deeply about?

Quite frankly, the effort in the House to bring a level of transparency in the earmark process, as good as it may appear, has yet to satisfy the American

people. As a first step to restoring confidence in the earmark system, Congressman JACK KINGSTON, a member of the Appropriations Committee, ZACK WAMP, a member of the committee, and myself have introduced H. Con. Res. 263, which calls for a joint select committee to review the earmark process, and it places a moratorium on all earmarks while the panel undertakes its work.

Congress holds the power of the purse, and, quite frankly, I don't believe the American people really want us to cede that authority to the executive branch. Under the Constitution, that is the job of the congressional branch. And while I believe that the majority of earmarks are for purposes which help people, those Members who oppose earmarks have made some legitimate claims, and they have to be addressed.

There have been positive earmarks to fight gangs, to fight the violent MS 13 gangs. We created an office of gang intelligence in the FBI to track the gang movement across the country, and there is a growing problem with regard to gangs.

The Iraq Study Group was an earmark, and that helped bring about fresh eyes on the target, if you will, bringing former Secretary of State Jim Baker and former cochairman of the 9/11 Commission, Lee Hamilton, along with Ed Meese, former Attorney General of the Reagan administration whose son is on the staff with General Petraeus over in Iraq, and people like Chuck Robb who is a former marine and Governor and Senator who fought in Vietnam. So it brought together a group of people to take a look at that, and 61 of the 70-some recommendations of the Iraq Study Group have been adopted now, and that basically was an earmark.

I also was told that the work that Dr. Francis Collins has done, and I may be wrong on this, but Dr. Collins has received the gold medal. He is the one who has mapped the human genome system. And there are people alive today because of the work that Dr. Collins has done. Dr. Collins will map those genes whereby we know that some individual with a certain gene may get a certain condition and now they can deal with that to save their life. So there have been some very positive ones.

But I think it is important to acknowledge that the Members who have opposed earmarks have made some legitimate claims, and they deserve that we look at those claims and address those claims.

The joint select committee on earmark reform, which is called for in the bill, would be comprised of 16 members, Mr. Speaker, evenly split between the House and the Senate, because whatever we do, the House and the Senate have to be together, also, between Republicans and Democrats. And I think the American people are thirsty. They are thirsty for some bipartisan activity

out of this Congress. So we will come together, Republicans and Democrats, House and Senate, to form this committee.

The panel would examine the way the earmarks are included in authorizing bills, which has not been done, appropriation bills. And to the credit of the committee, there has been some work done on the appropriations. Also, tax and tariff measures. Also, what has not been done very well, executive branch earmarks would also be studied. I want to stress that again, because I think the Congress has ignored some of this and I think the general public doesn't understand, but this panel would also, Mr. Speaker, look at executive branch earmarks, reviewing earmarks in all bills considered by Congress. All bills is really the key.

The House, during this period of time, should place a moratorium on all earmarks until the joint select committee has finished its work and we are able to put into place a rule system that restores the confidence of Americans that legislation is not loaded up with hidden special interests or wasteful spending. It would restore honesty, integrity, and openness to the process that everyone would feel very confident because the ground rules would have been agreed to by everyone. The American public would see how this was done.

I strongly support the earmark reform, including listing names of sponsors on earmarks or specific line item spending. But the rules, Mr. Speaker, must apply an equal standard to all legislation, appropriations, as well as authorizing and tax bills and disclosing earmark sponsors. It must be across the board in every bill, but it also must be a process of indisputable integrity and probity that is honest and authentic, and one in which the American people have absolute trust. That is the key. It has to be a process, Mr. Speaker, in which the American people have absolute trust.

Earmark reform must be bipartisan. It must be an issue on which both political parties can come together so that every Member of Congress can know what is in there, the American people can know it. And I am hopeful that Members on both sides of the aisle will join this effort and support the Kingston-Wamp-Wolf earmark reform bill.

Then, Mr. Speaker, we have the opportunity after we do that, because I know most Americans are concerned about the spending with regard to the Federal debt and the deficit. I have a bill with Congressman COOPER, again, a bipartisan bill, and again, it is good to see, we have to work across the aisle. It is called the Cooper-Wolf bill, Mr. Speaker, and what it does, it sets up a national commission of eight Republicans and eight Democrats, and I would tell Members that there are 70 Members plus on the bill, roughly 30 Democratic Members and 40 Republican Members. I must say, Congress-

man HOYER gave a very powerful speech at the Press Club several months ago endorsing this concept. On the bill, we have Congressman BOEHNER, the minority leader. We have Congressman BLUNT, the minority whip. We have people on both sides of the aisle of all political viewpoints from every part of the country. And what it does, Mr. Speaker, it puts everything on the table.

□ 1715

It puts Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and tax policy on the table. It has the support of the Heritage Foundation and Brookings. Alice Rivlin, head of the Office of Management and Budget in the Clinton administration, supports it. We have the support of some of the more thoughtful think-tanks, such as Brookings. A lot of different groups. We have had favorable editorials and comments from David Broder from The Washington Post, David Brooks from The New York Times, and Robert Samuelson, who writes a column for The Washington Post. Also we have had editorials in papers like the Tennessean and the Richmond Times Dispatch and papers like that.

What it would basically do, it would have this national commission of eight Republicans and eight Democrats to go around the country having a conversation with the American people. They would listen to the American people. Then they would hold public hearings in every Federal Reserve district in the Nation. So they are required to go everywhere.

Interestingly enough, the Brookings Foundation and Heritage, along with David Walker of the Government Accountability Office, are now doing this in what they call "wake-up tours," where they are going out around the Nation to tell the American people of the danger, the fiscal danger, the financial danger, that awaits this Nation if we do nothing about this spending and the debt and the deficit.

Congressman COOPER knows so much about this. I wish he was with me here today. But I respect his knowledge and understanding and his work on the Budget Committee.

But, Mr. Speaker, David Walker said, and I will insert it in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, I have sent it out to some Members of the House, David Walker said there was a tsunami, a financial tsunami off the coast waiting to come in and overcome and overtake this country.

As the father of five children, if our children were on the beach and someone said there was a tsunami off the coast of New Jersey or the North Carolina coast or the Maryland coast, we would as parents want to do everything we can to help our kids. So for our children and for our grandchildren, we have an obligation to deal with this problem.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I think it is also a moral issue. In the Ten Commandments it says: "Thou shall not steal,"

and for one generation to be living off the next generation is in essence stealing.

With all the support that we have, the bipartisan support, again, a lot of good Members on both sides of the aisle, I am hopeful that there can be a way that we can bring this bill up and vote on it in this session.

So with the earmark bill that I spoke about earlier which deals with a fundamental problem that the Congress has to deal with, and with this bill, we can have a renaissance in this Nation, create jobs and make a tremendous difference. So I just hope that we can pass both of these bills in this Congress.

I see my friend from Tennessee, and I will yield to the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. WAMP).

Mr. WAMP. Mr. Speaker, I thank FRANK WOLF for a distinguished career of public service. We honored the life of Tom Lantos today here in Congress, but FRANK WOLF is the same kind of person as Tom Lantos in terms of always caring about what is right, what is just, human rights anywhere and everywhere in the world that need our attention in the greatest Nation in the history of the world. FRANK WOLF is one of the people here that I look to always for the integrity on decisions that are controversial, that are impassioned. He seems to have a level-headed approach that honors the Constitution, honors what is right.

So here we are again working together. Jack Kingston and FRANK WOLF and I, as long-standing Members of the Appropriations Committee, know that this is a problem. This abuse of earmarks has created clearly the need for sweeping reforms of this process. But I think that we need to do it the right way instead of the wrong way.

One of the things I like about JOHN MCCAIN is that he doesn't pander to people based on whatever might be popular for the moment. The right approach to this particular problem with congressional earmarking in 2008 is to step back and establish a bipartisan, bicameral select committee to overhaul the process in its entirety.

I say that because any kind of a ban that is temporary or only for an individual is not lasting. So if you pledge to say no earmarks, well, for how long and who all is affected, and how about the Senate, how about the House, how about the executive branch, how about everybody else? Because unless it is a systemic change, it is not a permanent change; it is not a real change. It is a political posture. Therefore, we should be careful not to pander on this issue, but truly seek change. I think that is what this does.

This select committee, what is a select committee? Well, Congress has this provision so that that committee can rise above the other committees. It has subpoena power. It has tremendous authority. It is unusual. But it is a committee set up to reform a system like this.

Now, a lot of people don't realize that article I, section 9 of the United States

Constitution clearly says that Congress shall appropriate the money. We need also look at history and realize over the last 40 years there is a continuing separation of powers under way where the executive branch pulls and pulls more and more authority from the legislative branch.

One of the things that this select committee would allow us to do is over a 6-month period of time, with five public hearings, have a national debate about what is the Congress' role, what is the executive branch's role, both under the Constitution and in reality.

Just 2 weeks ago, February 1, the President's budget request came over. Actually, it was February 4. But when it came over, it was full of specific requests for specific programs which are an earmark. They are earmarks. So one of the first things we need to do with this select committee is define what is an earmark, because right now it is not clear as to what is and is not an earmark.

For instance, is it an earmark for a Member of Congress to request an increase in a specific account at the National Institutes of Health? If it is the National Institutes of Health and you believe that it should be increased and you are a Member of the United States Congress, and under article I, section 9 you have the authority to appropriate money, that should not be an earmark. But I have got news for you. A lot of things right now classified as an earmark should not be an earmark. It should be programmatic in nature; it should be looked at in a different way.

So this whole system needs an overhaul, and that select committee can get to that without people claiming turf protection or feeling like you are stepping on their toes, and then they can come back with these recommendations that would have the force of law and truly change this whole process without the legislative branch retreating from its constitutional responsibility or just ceding more and more authority to the executive branch, many times to people at the Office of Management and Budget, OMB, that submits these budget requests, who are neither elected nor educated enough on these issues to actually make these recommendations. That why it is important for elected representatives to do this in a very responsible way. The select committee is exactly that approach, the responsible way to do this.

It is comprehensive in nature. As Representative WOLF said, it doesn't just apply to the Appropriations Committee. It applies to authorization committees, tax and trade and tariff bills, the executive branch requests, the whole gambit of direction of funding of appropriated dollars. And the whole thing needs to be reformed.

I will give you an example. The Bridge to Nowhere request is one of the most egregious earmarks that we can point to, and it did not come through the Appropriations Committee. It was

in fact an authorization bill from the Transportation Committee. That is gas tax dollars that every 5 years the Congress directs to this projects or that projects or this priority or that priority, and in fact that Bridge to Nowhere was an authorization bill. So you can wipe out all the earmarks on appropriations; and if that is allowed to continue, the most egregious abuse we can point to continues.

You need a comprehensive and systemic approach to this, and that is why we have had consensus developing in our conference on the Republican side for basically a timeout, a moratorium: 6 months, no earmarks, hold up the trains, let's stop and do this right. But do it responsibly. Don't just willy-nilly say we are going to do this for political purposes or that for political purposes, or we are going to grandstand or pander. No, we are going to do this the way that people 50 years from now can look back and study the record and say, they put the institution and its congressional prerogatives and responsibilities above the passions of the moment, and they recognized that some people abused it and that needed to be cleaned up and reformed and changed, but they did not give the people down the street at the executive branch more and more authority and violate the separation of powers under the Constitution of the United States.

This is an important principle as we go forward on how to truly have a systemic approach to clean this mess up. But it needs change. Anybody who thinks that this system stands the "smell test" in America is wrong. It needs to change, and we are trying to change it from this place because that is the responsible thing to do. People have abused it.

I would argue that the last election in 2006 was lost by our party in large part because of these abuses of earmarks, on authorization, tax, trade, energy bills and appropriations, and we could use an overhaul, a statutory framework that the House and the Senate would both have to adhere to. The public is demanding it.

So some self-imposed thing is not going to bring about systemic change. Systemic change is what this institution needs, change that will still be here 10 years from now, not just for the next election. This shouldn't be political; it should be bipartisan.

Just this week, one of the leading Democrats here in the House basically called for the same thing. He said we ought to have a moratorium; we ought to have a timeout and we need to overhaul this practice. His name is HENRY WAXMAN. I talked to him today. I don't want to put words in his mouth. But I was encouraged that one of the leading Democrats said the same thing, basically: we need to have a comprehensive reform of this process known as earmarking.

But I believe step one is to define it, what is and what is not an earmark, and then go forward. Things that are

existing by law that have been around for a long period of time should not be an earmark.

Another thing we need to do is separate the ability of people to have a cottage industry through lobbying for earmarks. That, frankly, makes everybody in Washington look bad. It erodes the public trust over a period of time.

There are times where someone advocating for you for a specific cause in this country is necessary, and that is called lobbying. Today lobbying has a bad name. If I was a lobbyist I would want these reforms so that my reputation is not tarnished. Just like we appropriators, WOLF, KINGSTON, WAMP, KIRK, CULBERSON, WELDON, GOODE and others that have helped us with this cause, we don't want our integrity tarnished by the people who abused this prerogative under the Constitution.

They are the ones, just like the local law enforcement guy who takes a bribe, all police officers are not like that, and all Members of Congress are not going to do what these people did. Thankfully, the people that have violated our trust are either under investigation or they are already gone or some of them are in jail. But the system needs to be cleaned up so that they cannot do that again. That is what hasn't happened. Frankly, there are some people in this institution who are kind of arrogant about this, saying that it ought to continue and that there is no reason for reform. But that is not true either.

So we have got to meet in a rational, logical way. That is why the select committee approach is the right approach. I am very, very proud to stand with Representatives WOLF and KINGSTON and others in support of this approach, and we will have a moratorium on earmarks until we make the needed changes to begin to restore the public trust and uphold the honor and the dignity that should be associated with our fulfilling our responsibilities under the Constitution of the United States.

I thank the gentleman for yielding time.

Mr. WOLF. I thank the gentleman. His comments are very good. I think it really needs to be bipartisan and it needs to be institutionalized, and it needs to be done in such a way that the American people have confidence.

I would yield to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. KIRK), also a member of the Appropriations Committee.

□ 1730

Mr. KIRK. I thank the gentleman for yielding and join this group of what we might call apostate appropriators who are leading the reform cause, because I think we all agree that the current system was broken under Republican leaders and broken under Democratic leaders.

I believe that we should not tax the American people more than necessary, that taxpayer monies should be spent wisely, and that Congress should use its power to cut waste to keep taxes

low. Many congressional earmarks are a waste of the taxpayers' money.

I authored the amendment to kill the Bridge to Nowhere. It was a difficult choice, taking on a very powerful Member of Congress who had the ability, in some eyes, to delete all transportation funding for my own district. But I looked at this project, it was an earmark not by the Appropriations Committee but by the Transportation Committee, to build a \$320 million structure slightly shorter than the Golden Gate Bridge, slightly taller than the Brooklyn Bridge, connecting Ketchikan, Alaska, population 8,000, with Gravina Island, population 50. Gravina Island has no paved roads, no restaurants, and no stores. It was clear that this was an extravagant expenditure of money by the United States taxpayers to benefit a very, very few number of Americans.

It was also disturbing about how this project was handled, as so many other low quality earmarks are done: air-dropped without consideration by the House or Senate floors; no potential to amend or kill this project by Senators or Members of Congress; added to a conference report, that is a final bill, at the last minute where everyone is only given one vote, "yes" or "no," on the complete package and not able to reach in and delete funding for a low quality project.

Our battle, after the Kirk Amendment passed, was a long one, but finally the Governor of Alaska relented. And thanks to public outrage, thanks to congressional scrutiny, thanks to concerned Americans around this country, the Bridge to Nowhere will not be built.

But we have seen so many other projects which do not pass even a laugh test among American taxpayers. For example, a new earmark, I understand, for the Berkeley school system would create French gourmet menus for school lunches, clearly something that does not even pass the laugh test here on the House floor among Republicans or Democrats.

Also, we have seen these earmarks for Monuments to Me. I think it is perfectly appropriate when we see a proud public structure funded by the taxpayers to be named after one of our national heroes, to be named after a great American, or just great humanitarian from history, but not for sitting politicians who currently hold public office. I am worried that, for example, throughout West Virginia we have many Senator BYRD centers. It seems like almost a large part of the State is now named after a sitting Member of Congress, who comes with feet of clay, someone who can have great, great attributes and great detriments, and someone who really should be judged by history before we name great public works after them.

Our reforms talk about ending funding for these Monuments to Me. It calls for an increased level of, I think, appropriate humility in what we fund. In

the past, like many of my colleagues, I have requested earmarks because I have been struck by critical needs in my district. But increasingly, in order to get funding for small projects in your district, you are asked to support funding for large projects in other people's districts, for Bridges to Nowhere, for more Monuments to Me, for things that are, quite frankly, not defensible for the public fisc and for the taxpayers' expenditure. I think we have to recognize that some of these earmarks will simply lead directly to higher taxes for the American people and for programs which do not reflect an appropriate decision by the government to remove funding from an individual taxpayer to provide for these projects.

That is why I back this moratorium that we have come forward with and I back the Kingston-Wolf reforms, because I think it is a recognition by members of the Appropriations Committee that the system is broken; that the public's confidence in how this money is spent is not there; that Republicans and Democrats should join together to fix it; that the power of the purse is rightly put by the Constitution in the Congress. But it has to be a power that is respected. It has to be a power in which judgment is leveled and which the burden of proof is against spending the taxpayers' funds so that always we have a feeling towards the bottom line of balancing the budget and making sure the tax burden on the American people is as low as possible.

That is why I thank the gentleman from Tennessee and the gentleman from Virginia for having this Special Order and hope that this legislation can pick up bipartisan steam and be adopted by the American people. They get it, but some of the elected representatives of the American people here still don't get it, and their voices need to be heard.

I yield back to my friend from Virginia.

Mr. WOLF. I thank the gentleman. And in closing, unless the gentleman has any other comments, I would say this needs to be bipartisan. It is H. Con. Res. 263. I believe it will pass the House. I think it is inevitable that it will pass the House. We have to come together. I acknowledge there have been some sincere efforts made, and I think we come together and institutionalize this with regard to this select committee.

So I want to thank both Mr. WAMP and Mr. KIRK, and Mr. KINGSTON who could not be here, and the other Members who have put this together and say it needs to be done bipartisan. We have to do it so the American people can say, "Well done. It really makes sense."

I yield back the balance of my time.

GEORGE WASHINGTON

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. COURTNEY). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the