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Reject Pork in Homeland Security Appropriations

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Today the House of Representatives will consider homeland security appropriations for fiscal year 2008 in the first FY 2008 spending measure to reach the House floor. This legislation faces an uncertain future, for several reasons. First, it would provide \$2.1 billion more in discretionary funding than the Administration's request of \$36.3 billion. Second, it will be brought up under an "open" rule that will allow numerous amendments to be offered. The third reason—which is especially troubling—is language in the legislation's accompanying report that seeks to build the case for adding earmarks to the bill, possibly during conference negotiations with the Senate. To date, Congress has wisely avoided earmarking Department of Homeland Security appropriations. Allowing the earmarking of funds appropriated in the homeland security spending bill would subject the nation's security to the special interests of individual legislators and prevent the Department of Homeland Security from establishing the most effective national homeland security system possible.

The Primary Objective. The objective for homeland security funding is to direct money to the projects and programs that do the most to make America safer, as determined by sound risk assessment. If DHS is to take the lead in funding homeland security priorities, it needs the full understanding and cooperation of Congress. Shoveling billions of dollars, via earmarks, to specific projects or corporations jeopardizes this objective

and promises to stall progress toward protecting the homeland.

Past Precedent. When DHS was created in 2002, President Bush negotiated a ban on DHS earmarks with Congress. The purpose was to provide the new agency with enough room to fund its security priorities without facing political incentives that would have distorted its decisions. Five years later, there has yet to be a pork-filled Homeland Security appropriations bill. Now is not the time to start.

Keep it Real. Congress should uphold past precedent and continue the moratorium on homeland security earmarks. The 9/11 Commission warned against allowing Congress to turn homeland security into another pork giveaway, and opening the door to earmarks would do just that. Allowing politicians to see to the special interests of their districts and states, rather than allowing DHS to fund the nation's greatest homeland security priorities, will cost taxpayers more money and leave Americans less safe. The agency whose primary task is keeping America safe should not be burdened by the politics of pork.

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