



**Thursday, March 6, 2008**

***Capitol Hill Buzzing on the Topic of Earmarks***

Congressional Quarterly published several items today regarding possible changes in the future of earmarks. According to CQ, Speaker Nancy Pelosi said today, "My patience is running out on earmarks. We'll have them or we won't have them. We won't spend a lot of time talking about them." She is reportedly considering the move as a demonstration of fiscal responsibility.

House Appropriations Chairman David Obey has also been urging his colleagues to weigh-in on the issue. CQ's Budget Tracker reported today:

In a "Dear Colleague" letter sent to all House members, Obey set a March 19 deadline for signed responses. The letter asks them to choose between two positions: "I believe the House should suspend earmarks for the year. Consistent with this position, I will therefore be submitting no earmark requests for fiscal year 2009"; or "I believe the House should continue to provide responsible earmarks at a reasonable level and consistent with that position, I will be submitting appropriate requests for fiscal 2009." Obey said he needs the information because the panel intends to "move ahead with bills in a timely fashion." "I will assume that any member not returning this form by [March 19] wishes to see congressional earmarks discontinued and will therefore be submitting no requests for fiscal year 2009."

Pelosi would like to see infrastructure spending be the centerpiece of a new round of economic stimulus measures and a year without earmarks could possibly free up the funds to pay for it.

However, at a recent House Budget Committee markup, a GOP amendment to halt earmarks was rejected, 16-21. The amendment also would have created a bipartisan panel to review the earmarking process and recommend further changes. In a statement, OMB Director Nussle said, "The failure of this amendment signals that Democrats support business as usual in Washington. It is a missed opportunity."

We will keep you posted as any policies become official, but we thought you should be aware that this moratorium on earmarks is reportedly under consideration.