

Washington, DC -- U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan (R- FL 13) introduced legislation today to reform the way federal projects are "earmarked" by Congress for lawmaker's pet projects, usually in their home districts.

The "Earmark Accountability and Reform Act" (H.R. 1375) would ban last minute, backroom deals and grant the President a constitutional line-item veto to reduce spending and prevent abuse. An earmark is a line-item that is inserted into a bill to direct funds to a specific project or recipient without any public hearing or review.

The Congressman also announced that he will not advance any private earmarks from companies in his district or any other district until Congress cleans up its act and the earmark process is reformed.

"I am not opposed to federal earmarks for fully disclosed and worthwhile projects that benefit the public," said Buchanan. "But last minute, back room deals have wasted taxpayer dollars and eroded public confidence. My bill would bring much needed reform to the process while allowing lawmakers to continue to earmark discretionary funding to deserving projects."

Former Rep. Duke Cunningham (R-CA) is now serving an eight-year jail sentence on bribery charges stemming from abuse of the earmark process. Congressman Mollohan (D-WV) was investigated for earmarking more than \$150 million in taxpayer money to five nonprofit organizations he established in his West Virginia District. Other examples of abuse include a \$223 million earmark for the "Bridge to Nowhere" – a bridge in Alaska that would connect the town of Ketchikan (population 8,900) with its airport on the Island of Gravina (population 50) at a cost to federal taxpayers of \$320 million.

The 13th District Congressman noted that the number of earmarks authorized by Congress in appropriations bills alone increased from 4,155 in 1994 to 15,887 in 2005 -- an increase of 282 percent. Furthermore, 98 percent of the 3,000-plus earmarks added to a single appropriations bill last year were added in conference. Conference reports are bills for final passage and can not be amended.

"The process has been abused," added Buchanan. "Spending is out of control. This bill would help restore public confidence and ensure that taxpayer money is spent wisely and that only truly worthy projects are funded."

Buchanan said he will support worthwhile public projects backed by state and local government, such as road repairs and environmental initiatives, but he will not advance any private industry requests for earmarked federal funds until public confidence in the process is restored.

Buchanan's earmark reform bill would:

- Require conference reports to include only earmarks previously considered and passed by either the House or the Senate. This provision would eliminate those earmarks that frequently surface in the last stage of the legislative process — in conference committees between the House and the Senate;
- Establish a three-day "cooling off" period for legislation brought to the floor of the House for a vote. This will allow each member to closely scrutinize the bills for wasteful spending. This provision can only be waived with a two-thirds vote of Congress;
- Grant the President a constitutional line-item veto that allows the President to ask Congress to rescind federal spending on specific items.