

Thursday, January 31, 2008

It's a good thing consistency isn't a constitutional requirement for Members of Congress. We'd have an acute recruiting shortage.

I thought of this a few minutes after President Bush began his State of the Union address. It became particularly salient when he demanded an end to so-called "earmarks" and the entire Republican side of the House rose to their feet as one and hooped and hollered and pumped their fists in support and appreciation.

They rose, and my jaw dropped.

That's because all but a handful of those who stood and cheered the end of earmarks had submitted requests for millions of dollars of earmarks. And when they had control of the House, we had nearly double the amount of earmarks that we do now.

It was like watching bar-owners cheering Prohibition!

One Member -- who requested funds for a "National Home for the Christmas Tree" in his district, was leading the cheers. There was a chorus of opposition to earmarks by the people who increased earmarks by over 700 percent when they were in charge. (FYI - the new Democratic majority cut earmarks by nearly half in our first year and improved transparency by requiring that the sponsor of an earmark be listed in the text of the bill. And when we did, some of the same Republican Members who were cheering for the State of the Union TV cameras were grumbling privately about losing "their projects").

People have the right to disagree about whether a Member of Congress should direct funding to his or her district, but they should also consider that the Administration includes their own earmarks in the budget that the President requests from Congress each year. This is juxtaposed to project requests Members make on behalf of their districts—I'd like to think that I

know a lot more about the needs of Long Island than the federal bureaucrats sitting in Washington and that our community deserves to get its share of federal resources. Lastly, there are hundreds of programs throughout the federal government, particularly at the Pentagon, that started off as Congressional earmarks and are now considered 'must-haves' that are included in the President's budget.

Regardless of their opinions on these matters, there is no right to hypocrisy in the United States Congress.