

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN, RANKING MEMBER

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INFORMATION, FEDERAL SERVICES AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

“Tools to Combat Deficits and Waste: Expedited Rescission Authority.”

December 16, 2009

Senator Carper, thank you for holding this important hearing to examine expedited rescission authority – a type of line-item veto authority – as a tool for bringing our fiscal house into order. I want to welcome our panel of witnesses this afternoon. I am glad to see my good friend Senator Feingold here today. He and I introduced a bill earlier this year on expedited rescission authority and we are fortunate that he will be sharing his insights with us today.

Let me begin today with a little straight talk about our current fiscal predicament. Our current national debt is \$12.1 trillion and soon we may be debating whether or not to raise the national debt ceiling by up to another \$1.8 trillion. The federal deficit has ballooned to approximately \$1.6 trillion. Add in unfunded entitlement spending, the current severe recession and 10 percent unemployment and, simply put, you have a recipe for disaster.

Americans all over this country are hurting. People are waking up every morning wondering if they will lose their savings, their job, or their home. The issues we are facing as a nation require all of us, including Congress, to make sacrifices. As we limp towards the end of another appropriations cycle, however, I regret that our holiday gift to the American people is simply business as usual.

Congress has once again passed appropriations bills containing thousands of earmarks costing the taxpayers billions of dollars. The omnibus appropriations bill the Senate just passed spends \$450 billion, and is loaded up with 4,752 earmarks, totaling \$3.7 billion.

I am sure Americans will be pleased to learn that \$2.7 million of their money is going towards supporting surgical operations in outer space; \$800,000 for jazz at the Lincoln Center; \$3.4 million for a rural bus program in Hawaii; \$1.6 million to build a tram between the Huntsville Botanical Garden and the Marshall Flight Center in Alabama; and \$750,000 for the design and fabrication of exhibits to be placed in the World Food Prize Hall of Laureates in Iowa.

This is a repeat of the \$410 billion omnibus appropriations bill the President signed earlier this year containing approximately 9,000 earmarks. Some examples of earmarks in that bill include \$1.7 million for pig odor research in Iowa; \$6.6 million for termite research in New Orleans; \$2.1 million for the Center for Grape Genetics in New York; \$650,000 for beaver management in North Carolina and Mississippi; \$870,000 for wolf breeding facilities in North Carolina and Washington; \$819,000 for catfish genetics research in Alabama; and the list goes on and on.

Many of these projects were not authorized or competitively bid in any way. No hearings were held to judge whether or not these were national priorities worthy of scarce taxpayer dollars.

Congress's earmarking practices have grown worse, not better, just about every year I have served in the Senate. Members continue to elevate parochialism and patronage politics over the true needs and welfare of this nation. Given Congress' failure to take action, I am disappointed the President has not honored his campaign pledge to work to eliminate earmarks - "go through the federal budget - page by page, line by line - eliminating those programs we don't need," as he said.

Given the abysmal state of our economy, it is time for a bigger toolbox to address these problems, which is why we should provide the President with line-item veto authority. Earlier this year, Senator Feingold and I, along with Congressman Paul Ryan, introduced legislation to grant the President specific authority to rescind or cancel congressional earmarks, including earmarked spending, tax breaks, and tariff benefits. Granting the President the authority to propose rescissions which then must be approved by the Congress could go a long way toward restoring credibility to a system that encourages waste, special interest pork, and outright corruption.

This not a Democratic or Republican issue - it is a good government issue. Our current economic situation and our vital national security concerns require that now, more than ever, we put an end to wasteful spending. The American people are tired of what amounts to a broken process and they are tired of watching their hard-earned money go down the drain.