



San Joaquin Council of Governments

EARMARKS

San Joaquin Council of Governments established the One Voice trip in 2000. At its inception, the goal of the Washington, D.C. trip was for the organization to speak with a unified voice to educate Members of Congress regarding regional funding needs. At the time, the group primarily focused on earmarks, both in appropriations bills as well as in surface transportation authorization bills. The trip has evolved over the years as we have gone beyond educating Congressional Members and staff to meeting with federal departmental representatives regarding federal funding and regulatory relief needs, issues, and projects of significance to the San Joaquin region that were once eligible to receive Congressionally directed funding. The One Voice trip has continued despite the elimination of earmarks in 2010, and its focus has shifted to obtaining first-hand information on grants and other funding opportunities available to meet our regional priority needs.

Since 2010, a variety of Congressional Members have argued that in eliminating earmarks, they ceded the “power of the purse” to the Administration. Republicans and Democrats alike felt that they gave too much power to the Administration to determine how to use the discretionary funding once used for earmarks. Some have said this funding became somewhat of a “slush fund” for the Administration to use to create competitive grant programs that fit Administration priorities rather than needs of specific localities. Over the years, Members have said they know their districts better than the Administration and have a better understanding of which projects would have the most impact in their districts.

In the fall of 2016, House Republicans held internal discussions regarding earmarks. Speaker Ryan decided at that time that he wanted to have a transparent process regarding the potential use of earmarks in the 115th Congress. As a result, earlier this year Republicans announced the House Rules Committee would hold hearings before deciding whether and how to soften the current earmark ban. As the Rules Committee looks at the pros and cons of earmarks, the Council of Governments (COG) should also focus on the benefits of our Members having the ability to identify funding for projects specific to local governments and non-profits. The COG may want to take an official position in supporting Congressionally directed spending that would benefit local governments and have a regional impact.