

CAPITOL OFFICE:
1722 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-2472



AGRICULTURE
Conservation, Credit, Energy, and Research
General Farm Commodities and
Risk Management

MANKATO OFFICE:
227 EAST MAIN STREET
SUITE 220
MANKATO, MN 56001
(507) 388-2149

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE
Economic Development, Public Buildings, and
Emergency Management
Highways and Transit
Rail, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials

ROCHESTER OFFICE:
1134 7TH STREET NW
ROCHESTER, MN 55901
(507) 206-0643

TIMOTHY J. WALZ
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
FIRST DISTRICT, MINNESOTA
WWW.WALZ.HOUSE.GOV

VETERANS AFFAIRS
Oversight

April 9, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

Each year since I joined Congress, I have worked to make the appropriations and earmark process as transparent for the people of my district as possible. I know that you are deeply committed to increasing transparency and accountability around government spending decisions, and I am very impressed by the measures you have put in place for the FY2010 appropriations process and for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act spending. I am writing with a recommendation for how we can go further to gain and maintain the trust of the American people in this function of government.

As you know, since the Democrats took back the majority in Congress in 2006, we have worked to reform the way earmarks are approved and especially to open up the process to the public. I am proud to say that I have consistently advocated many of the reforms we have now mandated, undertaking them as a matter of policy.

I have posted my appropriations requests online every year of my tenure in Congress. In 2007, I released a complete list of my appropriations request for FY2008 – the only member of my state's delegation to do so. In 2008, I was one of only a handful of Representatives to include the dollar amount request in my public disclosure of FY2009 appropriations requests.

My office goes through a rigorous process in evaluating the impact that each project we request would have on southern Minnesota. And as a matter of policy, I do not submit earmark requests for for-profit entities, a practice that you rightly identified as the single most corrupting element of the earmark process.

I have always had very good results by striving to maximize public transparency and accountability in this way. I support the added scrutiny this year which requires all Members of Congress to publish earmark requests and dollar amounts requested on their website at the time the requests are submitted to the House Appropriations Committee.

My recommendation takes its inspiration in part from the excellent transparency and accountability measures you have put in place in connection with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the important legislation that will help the economy recover from this terrible economic crisis. With the recovery.gov website, you have put in place a centralized clearinghouse of public information, where the public can go to track how the money is being spent. That serves as an important check on the potential for waste, fraud and abuse, and will serve to reassure the public that their large investment is being well used.

My recommendation is that your Administration do the same with the earmarks approved in the FY2010 appropriations process. The public needs confidence not just that the process for approving earmarks is sound, but also that the money is being wisely and prudently spent once it has been appropriated. By establishing a website where the public can easily track how the money appropriated through earmarks for FY2010 is being used and by whom, the public will be able to hold both those who receive the funds and those responsible for appropriating them accountable. The heightened public scrutiny will in turn stem the impulse to irresponsible behavior in the first place and in the future. Such public transparency would serve, finally, of a good public test of how well the appropriations process works.

I hope that you will consider this recommendation and implement such a transparency and accountability measure. I sincerely believe it is fully in the spirit of your demonstrated commitment to transparency in government and in the appropriations process in particular.

Thank you for your consideration and thank you for service to the nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Walz', written in a cursive style.

Tim Walz
MEMBER OF CONGRESS