Member-Directed Funding

February 19, 2021

“Congress is about to bring back its secret weapon,” CNN headlined a column yesterday.

Congress? Weapon?

Be afraid.

Be very afraid.

“Earmarks are back,” Chris Cillizza immediately informs readers . . . you know, “what is technically known as ‘member-directed funding.’”

Before you can say “terrible idea,” the cable channel’s editor-at-large does admit that “members securing money for pet projects in their districts could go wrong.”

What’s not to like for an incumbent politician? They get to hand out money right in their districts, with their name attached to it.


“This is a sneaky big deal,” offers Cillizza nonetheless. “And a massive win for party leaders of both parties.”

Cillizza argues that it was a big mistake for Speaker John Boehner and the GOP leadership in Congress to take away their ability to reward individual congresspeople by stuffing a couple multi-million-dollar pet projects into the budget. What’s not to like for an incumbent politician? They get to hand out money right in their districts, with their name attached to it.

As long as a member of Congress plays ball.

The way the party bosses say.

In return, that incumbent can likely stay in this nation’s heralded leadership for years, decades.

When “you realize that in taking away earmarks,” explains Cillizza, “Boehner robbed party leaders of their most potent weapon to keep their rank-and-file in line on key votes.”

Is it even plausible for the functioning of our democratic republic that “party leaders” — nowhere mentioned or given any power in our Constitution — leverage our tax dollars to essentially buy off our representatives in order to keep our representatives “in line” on other important votes?

No.

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.