January 25, 2006

Dear Senator Frist,

As you know, the American people are currently engaged in a vigorous debate about our country's spending priorities. Many are openly discussing the propriety of earmarks and legislative policy provisions inserted into appropriations bills at the direction of individual lawmakers. We believe that the process of earmarking undermines the confidence of the American public in Congress because the practice is not open, fair, or competitive and tends to reward the politically well-connected.

According to the Congressional Research Service, the number of earmarks has skyrocketed over the past decade, from 4,126 in 1994 to 15,268 in 2005. We are committed to doing all we can to halt this egregious earmarking practice and plan to challenge future legislative earmarks that come to the Senate floor. This will give all Senators the opportunity to learn the merits of proposed earmarked projects and affirm or reject them. Even though votes on earmarks will undoubtedly be quite time-consuming, we sincerely believe that American taxpayers are entitled to a more thorough debate and disclosure about how their money is being spent.

We also believe that it is wrong to violate Senate Rules by inserting new provisions that are not included in either a Senate or House bill into conference reports at the last minute. The unsavory practice of inserting such provisions at the last minute stifles debate and empowers well-heeled lobbyists at the expense of those who cannot afford access to power. Decisions about how taxpayer dollars are spent should not be made in the dark, behind closed doors. Therefore, we also plan to challenge future violations of Senate Rules, and, as necessary, we will offer proposals to strengthen current Senate Rules in order to increase transparency and accountability in the expenditure of taxpayer dollars.

While we know that this course of action may not be popular in Washington, D.C., we believe that it is the right thing to do. We look forward to working with you over the next year, and we hope that you will join us in a spirited debate about the direction of our country.

Sincerely,

Senator Tom Coburn, M.D.

Senator John McCain