



Incoming Rules Committee Chairman Senator Feinstein
Calls for Senate Passage of Ethics Reform Package,
Pledges New Era of Bipartisanship and Transparency

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Washington, DC – As the incoming Chairman of the Senate Rules Committee, U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) today spoke on the Floor of the U.S. Senate to discuss the upcoming debate of the ethics, lobbying, earmark reform legislation – or S.1 – that will be put before the Senate tomorrow for consideration.

In her remarks, Senator Feinstein called for passage of the legislation and pledged a new era of bipartisanship and transparency.

“This is a new day. I agree that transparency and full disclosure act in the best interest of this body,” Senator Feinstein said. “It seems to me that along with the era of the anonymous earmark, the era of the anonymous hold ought to be put to rest with a big sign that says ‘rest in peace.’”

The following is the transcript of Senator Feinstein’s remarks on the Senate Floor:

“Mr. President, the Majority Leader has asked if, as the new chairman of the Rules Committee, I would come down and briefly say a few words about the bill we will be placing on the floor tomorrow. That bill is S. 1. This bill has passed the Senate before by a vote of 90 to 8. It offers the opportunity for the Senate to come together, in a bipartisan way, and pass lobbying reforms, some ethics reform, some earmarks reform, and take a real step together in an important way.

As we all know, the House has passed a set of rules, and so the conference is going to be an interesting one because the Senate will have its own bill. The House will have its own exclusive rules and hopefully will present some bill language from relevant committees in the House that we will be able to reconcile in the conference committee.

Tomorrow, with Senator Bennett as the Ranking Member, as well as Senators Lieberman and Collins, we will formally present this bill.

I hope that the presentation will reflect our commitment to work together to see that the discussion is full, that we understand that there are differences of opinion within the Senate on some of the points, but that it is critically important that action be taken.

We all know what has happened this past year. We all know that the results of the election have indicated that corruption is an important concern of the electorate – some say the most important concern, even with Iraq – that was voted on in this election.

So the voice of the people calling us to move ahead, pass legislation, and see that our House is clean and scrupulous is increasingly important.

I believe we will measure up.

The base bill that will be on the floor tomorrow is identical to the bill that was passed last year. It came to the floor in the early part of the year and was then passed by the Senate. It was held up in Conference over a difference of opinion on 527 reform. And from that point on, it was stymied and went nowhere.

It is also my understanding – and my staff has been a party to the discussions – that there will be a leadership amendment. That leadership amendment will be concurred to by the Majority Leader, the Minority Leader, the Chair and Ranking Member of Rules and others. It will essentially toughen the bill that was presented last year. We will deal with a number of issues, including strengthening the earmark language.

Now, I want to make a couple of personal comments on earmarks. In my view, this is the most difficult part of the entire bill, to reconcile feelings, to be able to develop some form of a consensus.

An earmark is an appropriation placed in the budget by Members of Congress. I believe earmarks should exist.

We have big States, and I come from a big State of 38 million people. We pay far more in taxes than we get back in services. Therefore, to be able to place in the budget certain critical items that benefit California's infrastructure and California's programs is important.

I also strongly believe that my name should accompany the earmark. I have no problem letting anyone know what earmark I have suggested.

I strongly believe that – and this is where I think I probably differ from some of my colleagues – if an earmark is added in the dark of night, if the earmark is not voted on by a subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee or Full Committee, it should be subject to a 60-vote point of order.

Right now, Rule XXVIII, according to the Parliamentarian, does not apply to earmarks per se but out-of-scope matters only – for example, ANWR. So I think the discussion in the ensuing week and a half is going to be an interesting one.

As we work on this issue, I say to the Members that I would very much like to know your views. I would like to work with every Member.

It is my intention as the new chairman of the Rules Committee to work openly and, hopefully, in a bipartisan way not only with the Ranking Member but with other Republicans and Democrats on that committee.

The first hearing we will have in the Rules Committee will be on the subject of the past election – specifically, the undervote in Sarasota, FL, on certain items on their ballot, e-voting, and what we might be able to do to assure people who vote that their vote is recorded accurately; that there are actually no switchovers; that there is no difference between how you press the button and how your vote is recorded; and that you can corroborate with a paper trail that, in fact, that is the way you voted.

I come to the Senate floor to make very brief opening remarks and signal my intention to work with the Rules Committee on this bill in a bipartisan way and, hopefully, to make as much progress as we can.

I have been an appropriator for 13 out of my 15 years in this body. I have served in different capacities, as we all have. We work our way up through the chairs in Appropriations. I think the time has come for earmarks, and for holds as well, to stop the anonymity, give them the full light of day; for Members who produce earmarks to be willing to defend them and that when earmarks are placed in the dark of night by a Member, they would be subject to a 60-vote point of order.

I will say one other thing about holds. A hold is something that a Member does to essentially indicate that they have a concern about a vote. It is difficult, from a parliamentary perspective, to take action because you may just want to hold a bill so that you have an opportunity to read it, which would just be 24 hours or so. Or you may have some mischief in your mind when you produce a hold.

I have seen holds that were put on virtually everything that came out of a committee because one Member wanted to make a point. I have seen Members put holds on every bill another Member had to make a point.

It seems to me that along with the era of the anonymous earmark, the era of the anonymous hold ought to be put to rest with a big sign that says ‘rest in peace.’

This is a new day. I agree that transparency and full disclosure act in the best interest of this body.

I look forward to presenting the bill tomorrow, along with Ranking Member Bennett, Senator Lieberman, and Senator Collins, and to the ensuing 6 or 7 days of discussion and amendments.

I want to ask one other thing, and that is that when the bill comes to the floor, Members come down and file their amendments so that in addition to the leadership-proposed substitute, we will have knowledge of what is about to come to the floor.

I yield the floor.”

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