



LIFT PERSPECTIVE

June 21, 2006

Congress, Texas must strengthen Line Item Veto

Federal spending, specifically wasteful Congressional earmarks, is out-of-control. Fortuitously, the US House of Representatives will shortly vote on President Bush's Legislative Line Item Veto Act. The Act overcomes problems with the Line Item Veto Act of 1996, which was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court on the grounds that it violated the separation of powers.

President Bush's 2006 Line Item Veto Act both improves on the previous act, and overcomes its constitutional flaws. Rather than creating a traditional line item veto power, the 2006 Act augments the President's authority. In addition, the 2006 Act would extend these powers to allow the President to veto both entitlement changes and discretionary appropriations. Congress would have to act on veto packages within ten days, which improves the current system in which veto packages can be voted down or simply ignored by Congress.

A line item veto would help restore budget discipline. Since 2001, federal spending has increased by 45%. The 2005 Transportation Bill included 6,500 projects requested by individual Congressmen, at a total cost of \$24 billion. Many of these projects, such as \$6 million for graffiti elimination in New York, or \$2.3 million for the beautification of a freeway in California, had little to do with relieving congestion or improving efficiency on America's roads.

Just as the line item veto would help control spending in Washington, strengthening the Governor's line item veto authority would bring additional fiscal restraints to Texas, where spending in the last biennium alone jumped \$14 billion over the previous biennium.

In its 2003 report to the 78th Legislature, "*A Roadmap to Responsible Reform*", the TCCRI argued that the Governor should have the opportunity to approve or veto any or all parts of an appropriations bill, and that the Governor should have line item reduction powers, enabling a reduction in spending without having to strike the entire amount of a given appropriation. This would provide the Governor with the tools to restrain legislative spending without being forced to choose between the complete elimination or approval of a given appropriation.

Line item vetoes are a vital tool for taxpayer protection by helping end the tide of wasteful spending.