

I worry about that, however. I worry if that will hold in the end when this bill gets through conference, because if we have that kind of criteria for earmarks in the bill itself, then the criteria which identifies programs of regional and national significance, programs and earmarks that are above the line that will not come out of a State's formula, if they are as loosey goosey as these criteria by which we claim these earmarks are related to transportation, the regular high priority earmarks, then we are going to see our formula dollars taken once again and spent on earmarks where they should not be.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, what we need is a turn-back bill. It is estimated that it would cost about 3 cents, rather than the 18.4 cents we are currently spending per gallon to maintain the interstate highway system. Instead, we are sending all 18.4 cents to Washington. Some of it makes it back. What does come back, comes back with mandates and stipulations that decrease the value of those dollars that we actually do receive back. It is no wonder that the roads and the infrastructure in this country are suffering so badly.

We need that turn-back bill. I have introduced it; it is awaiting action. In the meantime, certainly, we need to instruct and plead with the conferees on this bill to ensure that earmarks stay below the line, meaning, you can take all the earmarks you want, but they come out of your State's formula, not everyone else's. I urge the conferees to do this.

THE PIRATES OF EMINENT DOMAIN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DUNCAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the case of *Kelo v. City of New London*, a Connecticut eminent domain case which I think is one of the most important cases it will hear certainly during this term of court and for the future of this Nation.

Nationally syndicated columnist Jeff Jacoby wrote a column about this on February 28, and he quoted Scott Bullock of the Institute for Justice. Listen to what Scott Bullock said, "Every home, church or corner store would produce more jobs and tax revenue if it were a Costco or a shopping mall. If State and local governments can force a property owner to surrender his land so it can be given to a new owner who will put it to a more lucrative use, no home or shop in America will ever be safe again."

Jeff Jacoby asks, "But can government kick people out of their homes or businesses simply to make way for new development?"

No one gets concerned about the taking of property unless it is their property being taken. But this is getting to a very dangerous point in this country today. The whole history of eminent domain has been in large part taking land from the poor for the use and benefit of the rich and our government bureaucrats.

Government at all levels in this country now owns or controls half the land and continuously wants more. You can never satisfy government's appetite for money or land. On top of this, government at all levels is continually putting more and more restrictions on the land that remains in private ownership. If this trend continues, Mr. Speaker, housing prices will continue to skyrocket. New homes will be built on much smaller pieces of land, and more young families will be crowded into high-rise apartments or townhouses. A very important part of the American dream, home ownership, will slowly fade away for many young people.

Huge parts of East Tennessee, my home area, have been taken over the years from poor or lower-income families who would be rich today if they still had their land.

Columnist Thomas Sowell recently wrote about what he called the "misuse of the power of eminent domain" and how government was taking property from working class people. Columnist Sowell said this, "Those who are constantly denouncing greed almost never apply that term to what the government does, no matter how unconscionable it may be, as the routine misuse of eminent domain has become with its Robin-Hood-in-reverse redistribution of wealth."

Many people do not realize how important private property is to our freedom and our prosperity. As I said a few minutes ago, the Federal Government now owns or controls over 30 percent of the land and State, and local governments and quasi-governmental entities now own another 20 percent. Half the land is in some type of public ownership, and government at all levels keeps taking more and more and putting more and more restrictions on the land that is still private.

Richard W. Rahn, a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute, wrote recently, "Government-owned land is removed from the tax base, so it not only costs everyone to maintain it, but the government also loses tax revenue. When land is removed from private use by government ownership or unreasonable use restrictions, it reduces the supply of land, thus driving up housing prices."

Because of government taking or restricting use of land, more and more people are being forced on to smaller and smaller areas or developments. You can never satisfy government's appetite for land or money, and we des-

perately need to elect more people at all levels who will pledge to stop taking private property.

As I have said, it is just impossible to satisfy government's appetite for land, and over the last 40 years or so, governments at all levels have been taking private property at a very alarming rate.

Private property is an extremely important element for both our freedom and our prosperity. It used to be that eminent domain was used mainly to take private property for public use. Now, according to a column in the non-partisan *National Journal*, condemning private property for private use is a booming national business. The magazine gave several examples, including the taking of Randy Bailey's 27-year-old brake shop in Mesa, Arizona, for a new chain store.

This is happening in thousands of places all over the Nation. Jonathan Rauch wrote in the *National Journal*, "In the last decade, it has become common for city leaders to define blighted as not developed as nicely as we would prefer or not developed by the people we would prefer. But property is held sacrosanct in America not to protect the rich and powerful, who always make out all right, but to protect the poor from the predations of the rich and powerful."

He quoted in his column an official of the Institute for Justice, a law firm trying to protect private property owners, as saying "this is now a major nationwide problem."

Once again, I will say, I hope we elect more people to Federal, State and local offices who will stop taking so much private property. It sounds good for a politician to create a park, but then when that land is taken off the tax rolls, the taxes for everybody else have to keep going up. We are doing this at a very, very alarming rate, and we need to at least cut back on this.

We cannot take care of all the national parks and State parks and local parks that we have in this country today, and we need to stop taking more, or we are going to ruin our economy, and we are going to take away an important part of the freedom that we have in this Nation.

SUPREME COURT NOT FOLLOWING PRECEDENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, there have been times in this Nation's history when the United States Supreme Court was composed of distinguished jurists who were extremely cautious to avoid inserting the justices' will or desires in place of legitimate decisions and legitimate legislation. That, sadly, is no longer the case.