

## **Don't throw out the baby with the earmarks**

By HAROLD MOORE

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The new Congress has embraced the new year with a flurry of admirable resolutions to give us better government. Perhaps none is more important than its new rules on ethics and the budget. Commendable legislation will require that members of Congress clearly identify their support for programs that receive "earmark" appropriations, which are decided by individual members.

But Congress may be overreaching. There will be no earmark appropriations in federal fiscal year 2007. While some earmarks are clearly a waste, such as Alaska's infamous "bridge to nowhere," many others, especially those that are part of national programs to solve entrenched problems, are desperately needed at a time when crime, poverty, inequality and racial segregation are increasing.

Essential initiatives, from life-saving AIDS programs to funding for programs to help ex-offenders and poor women get on their feet, could lose funding. It's not just the existing programs that are in trouble but the expansion of initiatives designed to help those most in need may soon lose federal funding in the clean sweep.

In Milwaukee, where crime is among the worst for cities its size, we could be hit hard. We led the nation with our increase in homicides last year, up by 40%. Despite a zero-tolerance approach, violent crime is rising.

It's clear that we need solutions to a mushrooming crime rate often borne of poverty, disaffected youth who live without hope, drug addiction and dropout rates that result in only 43 of 100 students graduating from high school.

There are proven solutions that come from scientific evaluation and decades of replication that can reduce crime, develop youth, reform public schools, increase graduation rates, provide paths for ex-offenders to create productive lives, link job training to job placement with upward mobility, help poor women become a lasting part of the work force and stabilize families.

The Eisenhower Foundation, which is the private-sector continuation of the seminal Kerner Commission formed by President Johnson to propose solutions to the American dilemmas of race and poverty, has for more than 25 years developed and brought such solutions to cities around the country.

It is part of a philosophy of multiple solutions to multiple problems that embraces a range of initiatives that stabilize an entire community to bring it out of poverty and dislocation: community policing, community banking, job training for poor women, ex-offender initiatives and more.

The foundation was hoping to bring some of these solutions to Milwaukee, funded in large part by federal appropriations. The foundation's process of scientific evaluation nationally of these efforts brings badly needed accountability to the earmark process. The programs are proven - through a meticulous collection of data - to cut crime, increase graduation rates and help our young people succeed.

Working with the United Community Center on Milwaukee south side and the Dr. Howard Fuller Education Foundation on the north side, the Eisenhower Foundation hopes to bring to Milwaukee three programs: Youth Safe Haven-Police Ministations for elementary school kids, Full Service Community Schools for middle-schoolers and Quantum Opportunities for high-schoolers.

For high-risk youths ages 6 to 12, many of whom are being recruited for gangs, the Youth Safe Haven-Police Ministation program keeps youth out of trouble and improves their school performance.

For middle-schoolers, Full Service Community Schools involve parents, incorporate health centers and give teachers more time to teach - in schools that stay open from early morning to late at night, year-round.

For high-risk youths in high school, many of whom are vulnerable to gang recruitment, the Quantum Opportunities program keeps them in school; improves their school performance; keeps them out of trouble; reduces gang involvement, crime and teen parenting; and helps instill a sense of responsible citizenry through community service.

The Fuller foundation's Safe Place Site has for years offered after-school and summer programs for youths ages 6 to 19 to keep them off the streets. In one year, nearly 240 students were touched by the program. It is not enough.

The opportunity to expand and replicate the proven programs of the Eisenhower Foundation is a critical step for Milwaukee to begin to turn around the high dropout rates and the growing youth crime that lead to cyclical poverty and shattered lives.

Milwaukee vitally needs that help, and Congress should be judicious in its zeal to rectify the budgetary process and take special care that the people who get hurt in the end are not those who need help the most.

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