

Let's make this clear — Certain recent events indicate that Congress may finally be discovering the virtues of transparency. First, Rep. John Boehner has gotten the House of Representatives to adopt a new rule that requires all Congress members to sign off publicly on "earmarked" projects, i.e., pork-barrel projects. More dramatically, President Bush has just signed the "Federal Transparency Act," Sen. Tom Coburn's shrewd and helpful bill, which establishes a publicly accessible database of over a trillion dollars in federal contracts, loans, and grants.

These structural changes will act as a deterrent to pork-barrel spending: the public and press will be better able to find out who is behind many if not all pork projects approved. This will certainly be a deterrent, because most congressmen and all senators now rely on contributions from people outside their states; a record of pork that may please the voters in your district will cost you support elsewhere.

Ralph Nader, in a recent letter printed in *The Wall Street*

Journal, has suggested a good further step. Nader, a man for whom I usually have little respect, has proposed that we require that the full text of *all* federal contracts (suitably redacted to remove sensitive information) likewise be posted in a publicly accessible database. The public and the press would then be in a better position to look for patterns of corruption in government procurement.

I would take these excellent proposals one step further. Why not require that the same publicly accessible database be set up for the UN? We could head off future financial fiascos such as the infamous Oil for Food program. We could also see whether the voting behavior of member states is being swayed by their corrupt business dealings. Put all the data online for the public and press to scrutinize. As the old saw has it, sunlight is the best disinfectant. — Gary Jason