

Earmark critics on both sides of the aisle have teamed up to offer the first bipartisan bill that would deny earmarks to for-profit companies.

Four Democrats, Reps. Jim Cooper (Tenn.), Ron Kind (Wis.), Adam Smith (Wash.) and Tim Walz (Minn.), joined GOP Reps. Jeff Flake (Ariz.), Jeb Hensarling (Texas), Mark Kirk (Ill.) and **John Campbell (Calif.)** as the initial sponsors of the bill.

“There’s a wide range of opinions [about what to do about earmarks] in this Congress, but we have a major problem,” said Kind. “It’s a bipartisan problem and we need a bipartisan solution.”

President Obama has called on Congress to produce legislation reforming earmarks, and said earmarks for for-profit companies represent the “single most corrupting factor” in the earmark process.

While Obama doesn’t support a complete ban on earmarks for private companies, he has said they should be subjected to a competitive bidding process and heightened scrutiny.

Support from the reform-minded Democrats comes as two senior members of the party, Reps. John Murtha (D-Pa.) and Pete Visclosky (D-Ind.), two Appropriations Committee cardinals, face scrutiny for directing earmarks to a lobbying firm under investigation by the FBI.

House Democratic leaders have outlined a reform plan that would require lawmakers to post earmark requests on their websites with an explanation of why they are an appropriate use of taxpayer funds. Their plan also would require earmarks benefiting private companies to undergo a competitive bidding process.

Critics like Flake argue that’s not enough. He has said lawmakers and agencies overseeing projects funded by earmarks already insist that competitive bidding processes are in place,

even if the recipient of the funds is the only company that offers the product.

“Simply put, individual members of Congress shouldn’t have the ability to award no-bid contracts to private businesses,” said Flake.