



Defense Appropriations Bill Full of Pork

The Defense appropriations bill signed by President Obama last month was filled with 1,720 different special earmarks. These earmarks seldom had anything to do with national defense or security policy.

[Fox News](#) analyzed the bill, and found a number of outrageous examples of earmarks in this bill, including:

- \$5 million for a visitors center in San Francisco
- \$23 million for indigent health care in Hawaii



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- \$18 million for the Edward Kennedy Policy Institute in Massachusetts
- \$1.6 million to computerize hospital records in Oakland
- \$47 million for anti-drug training centers around the country
- \$20 million for the World War II Museum in Louisiana
- \$3.9 million to develop an energy-efficient solar film for buildings ...
- \$2.4 million for handicap access and a sprinkler system at a community club in New York

Obama, only four months earlier, pledged to veto any defense bill that came to him laden with pork-barrel spending. He did not keep his promise. Had he done so, Congress would have had to either override his veto with a two-thirds vote of both Houses or (much more likely) pass a revised version of the bill.

Moreover, prior to this bill (or other pork-laden bills) reaching his desk, the president could have worked to prevent pork spending from becoming a part of the legislation in the first place. As leader of the majority party in Congress, Obama could have exercised political muscle on congressional leadership to keep this menagerie of odd projects out of the legislation.

He could also have made the federal legislators, of either party, who put pork into bills "famous." The prospect of such national notoriety would almost certainly be enough to scare off senators and congressmen from earmark wasteful, unnecessary, and/or unconstitutional spending. Then again, that would be a lot like the pot calling the kettle black, since the President is very much a champion of big spending.

Big-spending politicians — including Barack Obama — have condemned pork-barrel earmarks added by congressmen, yet those earmarks comprise a relatively small portion of total federal spending. Regarding the Defense appropriations bill, for example, Fox News reported that the "\$636 billion behemoth" was "loaded with \$4.2 billion of pork" — or less than one percent of the total cost of the bill. Was the remaining 99-plus percent necessary spending? According to Fox News, the legislation also included another "\$5 billion for two destroyers, 10 C-17 cargo planes and to develop a jet engine the



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on January 4, 2010

Pentagon neither wants nor needs." And not raised by this particular Fox News article is the question of how much the defense appropriations bill could be trimmed, without in any way harming our national security, if the United States were to move away from its current foreign policy of interventionism and nation building.

National defense is, of course, a necessary and constitutional function of the federal government. But the government is also engaged in many unconstitutional areas from foreign aid to healthcare to education — and like the Defense appropriations bill, a relatively small part of the spending in non-defense appropriations bills is earmarked. Consider, for example, the \$700 billion in TARP funding to bail out the financial sector — spending that was supported by Barack Obama both as senator (when the legislation was initially enacted) and President (when the second half of the \$700 billion was made available). This bailout bill did not contain congressional earmarks specifying exactly how the money would be spent. But the lack of these earmarks did not make the bailout less expensive or even necessarily less harmful to the economy.

Of course, all wasteful, unnecessary, and/or unconstitutional spending should be eliminated from the federal budget, including any and all earmarks that fall into this category. But simply getting rid of the congressional earmarks will not end the federal spendathon.



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