



Report: Obama Used Earmarks to Promote Controversial Legislation

According to a new report by The Heritage Foundation, the White House handed out “administrative earmarks” to Democratic legislators to sway them to vote for major legislative efforts such as cap-and-trade and the healthcare overhaul.



Administrative earmarking transpires when the federal government distributes funds from its discretionary budget for specific projects. Unlike legislative earmarking, the administrative use of taxpayer dollars for political favors is largely camouflaged, since, according to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), “[t]here is no source that defines and comprehensively identifies Administrative earmarks.”

In examining grants from agencies during the early part of President Obama’s tenure, the conservative think tank found that moderate Democrats, who tended to waver on Obama’s more controversial proposals, collected generous bounties right around the passage of three key legislative efforts: the cap-and-trade bill, Dodd-Frank financial regulations, and the healthcare overhaul.

“During the run-up to votes in the House of Representatives for each of those pieces of legislation,” the report noted, “the rate of administrative earmarking spiked.” The distribution of earmarks surged around the time of these controversial votes, then dropped, only to shoot up again when the next vote arrived.

“When you examine the recipients of those grants, there were at least 32 vulnerable house Democrats who received significant federal grant money during the run-up or directly after the votes on those pieces of legislation,” [asserted](#) Lachlan Markay, who authored the report.

Congressional Democrats in the Midwest were more reluctant to support Obama’s cap-and-trade bill, particularly as the President openly acknowledged that it would significantly increase energy prices. Likewise, ObamaCare was controversial from the beginning, and has remained that way ever since, as people have seen their insurance premiums rise and questions over the law’s constitutionality continue to flare.

Due to the flagrant controversies surrounding these proposals, on their websites these “moderate” Democratic lawmakers were careful not to broadcast their votes, but did tout extensively the funding they received for local projects. “As a way to counteract the negative voter sentiment that would come from voting for unpopular legislation,” Markay suggested, “these were attempts to make sure that constituents knew they were bringing money home to their district.” For, example, the report indicated:

Then-Rep. Chris Carney (D-Pa.), for instance, kept his support for Dodd-Frank quiet. His website



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on February 23, 2012

never posted a press release announcing his “yes” vote on the bill. It did, however, tout two federal grants totaling \$3.6 million for businesses in his district two days before the Dodd-Frank vote.

Then-Rep. Zach Space (D-Ohio) hailed from a district reliant on the coal industry, which would have been hit particularly hard by cap and trade. He voted for the measure, but neglected to publicize the vote on his website. He did, however, announce eight federal grants totaling roughly \$1.8 million all made during the month before the House passed cap and trade.

The use of administrative earmarks for political barter is not a new phenomenon. President Franklin Roosevelt was an active participant in administrative earmarking, delivering “large defense projects to key states whose electoral votes he wanted to secure,” according to historian Burt Folsom. President Richard Nixon [viewed the process](#) as “a way to gain political support for [his] re-election by using federal resources and grants to influence key states and voting blocs.”

But while the practice has been utilized by nearly every administration, the CRS affirmed in a [report](#) published in April 2010 — right after ObamaCare was passed into law — that “[b]oth the number and value of earmarks requested solely by the President increased since FY2008.” The CRS concluded that earmark use increased by 54 percent and the value of administration earmarks under Obama spiked by 126 percent.

Hans von Spakovsky, former Federal Elections Commissioner and legal fellow at Heritage, contends that the drastic fluctuations in earmark use display veritable evidence of political bargaining. The administration’s practices, Spakovsky asserts, “show how taxpayer funds are used for crass political purposes — it is a rank abuse of the government’s power and another sign of this administration’s lack of compass.”

Despite the evidence, the administration has denied such practices. “The president’s opposition to earmarks is well known. The fact of the matter is I’m confident the issuance of grants from agencies are done... in a merit based way,” said White House Press Secretary Jay Carney. However, Obama’s early efforts to ignite economic growth through legislative stimulus have been infested with federal grants and political kickbacks.

“Is there any better evidence of this theory than President Barack Obama’s \$1 billion earmark for a special project in Illinois that was slipped into his failed \$862 billion stimulus?” wrote Heritage’s Brian Darling in an August 2010 [blog post](#). Among many other earmarks planted in Obama’s legislative proposals, this \$1-billion earmark is the “largest pork-barrel project in our nation’s history with borrowed money,” asserted Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.).

According to the *Washington Post*, in a [story](#) dated March 6, 2009:

Deep inside the economic stimulus package is a \$1 billion prize that, in five short words, shows the benefits of being in power in Washington. The funding, for “fossil energy research and development,” is likely to go to a power plant in a small Illinois town, a project whose longtime backers include a group of powerful lawmakers from the state, among them President Obama.



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