

Delegates decry earmarks while securing earmarks for Wyoming

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CHEYENNE -- All three members of Wyoming's congressional delegation voted to kill the \$410 billion omnibus federal spending bill that became law this week, calling the bill "fiscally irresponsible" and "pork-laden."

But a Star-Tribune analysis of the legislation shows that the delegates themselves secured 32 spending "earmarks" in the bill, mostly to pay for projects back home, worth roughly \$14.5 million.

U.S. Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo, brought home the most money, securing four earmarks valued at \$2.71 million, and sponsoring or co-sponsoring 19 total earmarks worth \$12.37 million, according to Taxpayers for Common Sense, a nonpartisan watchdog group that tracks federal spending.

U.S. Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., directly secured five earmarks worth \$1.73 million, and sponsored or co-sponsored 18 total earmarks valued at \$10.89 million, the figures show.

Former U.S. Rep. Barbara Cubin, R-Wyo, won five earmarks worth \$900,000 and had her name on 14 total earmarks worth \$3.89 million, according to Taxpayers for Common Sense.

Rep. Cynthia Lummis, who succeeded Cubin in the U.S. House of Representatives in January, was not part of the omnibus budgeting process. She voted against the bill last month when it appeared in the House.

Barrasso and Enzi on Wednesday defended their spending projects, saying they submitted the requests long before the national economy began to falter, and asked to have them stripped out when it did.

But Bill Lockett, executive director for the Wyoming Democratic Party, said the delegation's pointed criticism of earmarks while securing funding for their own pet projects is "blatant hypocrisy."

"It's an insult to the intelligence of Wyoming's people that they scream about earmarks out of one side of their mouth while they stick earmarks in the spending bill with the other side," Lockett said.

"It was Jesus Christ who said, 'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone,' " he added.

Signed by President Barack Obama on Wednesday, the omnibus spending bill includes more than 8,500 earmarks worth roughly \$7.7 billion for projects across the nation.

Most of the earmarks for Wyoming will deliver money directly to the state, including millions for highway and cultural projects, education and the University of Wyoming.

A portion of the funds will be shared with other states. For example, \$650,000 inserted by Barrasso to fight the bovine disease brucellosis will benefit those efforts in Wyoming, Montana and Idaho.

Often derided to as "pork," earmarks have long been part of the federal budgeting process. Critics say they add millions in unnecessary spending to the federal budget and national debt.

Wyoming's congressional delegation joined that chorus Tuesday when it slammed the bill's "pork-barrel" spending in a collaborative statement to the news media.

"My constituents don't work double shifts to put food on the table for their family while also serving up a dish of pork to people a thousand miles away," Enzi said in the statement.

"This pork barrel spending is frightening people," Barrasso added. "Washington is setting spending records it should be ashamed of."

When asked to reconcile those remarks with the millions in earmarks for Wyoming in the bill, Barrasso said the nation's financial circumstances have changed since he pushed for the local earmarks.

He also noted that he voted against the omnibus spending bill on Tuesday, including his own earmarks.

"I asked to strip every earmark from the bill, including the Wyoming earmarks, and I voted for that," Barrasso said. "I called for the president to veto the bill, and he should have vetoed the bill."

Barrasso said he also voted against the spending bill because it will strip Wyoming of millions in abandoned mine lands funds owed to the state.

The Obama administration has proposed eliminating payments to coal-producing states beyond what is required to clean up abandoned mines.

"This bill steals \$20 million from Wyoming," Barrasso added.

Enzi said he believed his earmark requests would be subject to the regular appropriations process, including committee and floor debate, and multiple votes, spokeswoman Elly Pickett said.

Instead, the omnibus spending bill this year was "hijacked" and inflated to an amount 8 percent larger than last year's bill.

"Subsequently, Senator Enzi co-sponsored an amendment to strip all earmarked projects, even his own projects, from the omnibus bill," Pickett said. "That amendment failed. Senator Enzi voted against the bill."

Lummis noted that she had no hand in the 2009 spending bill, but she said the whole earmark process should be reconsidered.

She also pledged not to sponsor any earmarks in the upcoming budget process because of the nation's financial woes.

"My inclination, based on what I heard during the campaign, the feedback I got, is that during times of economic turmoil and runaway spending, the notion of earmarks should be revisited," Lummis said.

Wyoming's total share of the earmarks in the 2009 omnibus spending bill is the smallest in the nation, but on a per-capital basis the state ranks 21st in earmark spending, with roughly \$27.25 for each Wyoming citizen, according to Taxpayers for Common Sense.

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Wyoming's share

Wyoming's congressional delegation succeeded in securing 32 earmarks worth about \$14.5 million in the 2009 federal omnibus spending bill that passed this week. Here's a look at most of those items, who sponsored them and how much they cost:

- \$300,000, Lincoln County water treatment plant rehabilitation project, Enzi.
- \$3.42 million, University of Wyoming biology research lab, Enzi, Barrasso.
- \$650,000, Greater Yellowstone Interagency Brucellosis Committee in Wyo., Mont., Idaho, Barrasso.
- \$926,000, Tri-State Predator Control in Wyo., Mont., Idaho, Enzi, Barrasso, Cubin.
- \$242,000, Animal disease research, Enzi, Barrasso, Cubin.
- \$200,000, Accelerate soil matting survey, Enzi, Barrasso, Cubin.
- \$475,000, 17-Mile road construction, Wind River Indian Reservation, Enzi.
- \$1.9 million, Grand Teton National Park pathways system, Barrasso.
- \$1.9 million, Interstate 25 reconstruction, Glenrock to Casper Hat Six section, Enzi, Barrasso.
- \$380,000, Resurfacing and reconstruction of I-80 between Rock Springs and Rawlins, Enzi, Cubin.
- \$95,000, Highway 59 improvements from Gillette to Wright, Enzi, Barrasso, Cubin.
- \$114,000 Ark Memorial Foundation in Wyoming for construction of Creative Arts Center, Cubin.
- \$95,000, Carbon County Museum Foundation for construction of multi-use museum, Cubin.

- \$475,000, Casper College for creation of business incubators, Barrasso.
- \$171,000, Citizens for Civic Auditorium for planning and construction of Casper Civic Auditorium, Cubin, Barrasso.
- \$380,000, City of Evanston for improvements to the Historic Evanston Roundhouse and Railyard, Enzi.
- \$285,000, Native American Indian, Alaskan and Hawaiian Educational Center in Sheridan, to expand professional development in early literacy and math programs for teachers, Enzi.
- \$428,000, Central Wyoming College in Riverton for construction, renovation and equipment, Enzi, Barrasso.
- \$190,000, Central Wyoming College for the Virtual Medical Skills Center for training nurses in rural health care, Enzi, Barrasso.
- \$381,000, Laramie County Community College in Cheyenne for renovation, equipment and training, Enzi, Barrasso.
- \$285,000, Midwest Community Clinic in Midwest for construction, renovation and equipment, Enzi.
- \$238,000, UW Center for Rural Health, Research and Education for health information technology, Barrasso.
- \$190,000, Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody for digitizing and editing William F. Cody research project, Cubin.
- \$250,000, City of Gillette WyoLink upgrades, Cubin.
- \$75,000, The Wyoming Meth Project, Enzi, Barrasso, Cubin.
- \$50,000, University of Wyoming to address gaps in substance abuse treatment and transitional services, Cubin, Barrasso.
- \$75,000, University of Wyoming to address the need for transitional services for recovering addicts, Enzi, Barrasso.
- \$250,000, City of Casper public safety officer training center, Cubin.
- \$856,000, Wyoming underground carbon dioxide storage testing program, Enzi, Barrasso, Cubin.

Source: Taxpayers for Common Sense.