

2007 BUDGET BOONDOGGLE AWARD – HONORABLE MENTION THE BLOATED OMNIBUS

No year-end Budget Boondoggle Award would be complete without a mention of the Majority's bloated Omnibus Appropriations bill. This legislation was a disaster on many levels. The bill not only contained thousands of wasteful earmarks, it also failed to eliminate many of the duplicative and wasteful programs highlighted by Committee Republicans in the original Budget Boondoggle Award in October 2007.

To make matters worse, the Omnibus represented an abuse of the appropriations process.

For its many problems, the Omnibus Appropriations bill is given an Honorable Mention in the Budget Boondoggle competition.

Failure on Earmarks

- **Nearly 9,000 Earmarks.** The Omnibus included 8,967 earmarks at a cost of \$7.5 billion to taxpayers.
- **Nearly 300 Air-Dropped Earmarks.** Among the thousands of earmarks were 298 “air-drops” – added in conference, dodging scrutiny by committees and House Members – at a cost of \$809 million.
- **Hundreds of Earmarks for Nonfederal Priorities.** The numerous nonfederal priorities funded by earmarks include the following:
 - *Thirty-four earmarks* for museums and museum exhibits (\$7 million).
 - *Twenty-five earmarks* for sidewalks and streetscapes (\$8.6 million).
 - *Twenty-one earmarks* for bike paths and trails (\$11.6 million).
 - *Twenty earmarks* for the YMCA (\$4.9 million).
 - *Twelve earmarks* for weed and animal waste management (\$5.2 million).
 - *Three earmarks* for fruit fly research (\$748,000).
 - *Two earmarks* for pools and aquatic centers (\$418,000).

Failure to Eliminate Wasteful and Duplicative Spending Programs

- **Numerous Boondoggle Candidates Survive.** When the Budget Boondoggle Award was launched last year, the announcement included a range of highly “qualified” candidates for the award. Yet many of these programs continue to receive funding in the Omnibus. These programs, which are wasting resources much better spent on priorities such as homeland security, veterans, and education, include the following:
 - *The Advanced Technology Program [ATP].* The President and House Republicans

proposed to eliminate this form of corporate welfare, and it was deauthorized early in 2007. Nevertheless, the Omnibus funded it at \$65 million.

- *The National Capital Arts and Cultural Affairs [NCACA] Program.* This program, which provides non-competitive grants to Washington, DC cultural organizations, such as the Kennedy Center, that already receive substantial contributions from nonfederal sources, was funded at \$8.5 million, 20 percent more than 2007.
- *The Federal Citizens Information Center [FCIC].* This center, which gives out information about how to get a good airfare deal and how to buy a car, was funded at \$17.3 million, a 16-percent increase from 2007.
- *OMB Program Eliminations Ignored.* In the President's fiscal year 2008 budget, the Office of Management and Budget [OMB] recommended the elimination of 91 government programs consistently identified as duplicative or ineffective. This would have saved \$4.9 billion in taxpayer dollars. But the Omnibus continued to fund 85 of these 91 programs, leaving \$4.8 billion of the potential savings untouched. To make matters worse, many of these programs actually received funding *increases*.
- *PART Ratings Ignored.* In 2007, the administration's Program Assessment Rating Tool [PART] rated 25 programs as ineffective for their failure to achieve their goals. The Omnibus increased funding for 13 of these 25 programs, without increasing oversight.

Failure on Process

- **Seventy-Nine Days Overdue.** The Omnibus was not passed until 19 December, 79 days (nearly three months) *after* the start of the fiscal year, on 1 October.
- **No Time to Read.** The Omnibus was filed after midnight the day of the vote, leaving Members without time to read its contents.
- **Eleven Bills in One.** The Omnibus combined 11 of the 12 regular appropriations bills, subjecting the whole package – totaling more than a half trillion dollars – to a single up-or-down vote. This denied Members the opportunity to vote on the merits of each appropriations bill individually.
- **More Than 3,400 Pages.** The Omnibus was more than 3,400 pages long, and weighed in at more than 34 pounds.
- **Gimmicks.** The bill included approximately \$20 billion in gimmicks intended to artificially lower the cost of the bill. Examples include:
 - \$11.2 billion in “emergency” spending that is exempt from budget limits.
 - \$2 billion worth of “advance appropriations” – money provided in 2008 that will not be spent or counted until fiscal year 2009.

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- *\$7.4 billion* in phony savings.
 - **Martial Law.** The Omnibus was filed under “martial law,” a procedure denying Members the opportunity to review the bill and allowing only one hour of debate.