



EARMARKS

Research and Development Funding in the President's 2006 Budget

The Administration strongly supports awarding research funds based on merit review through a competitive process. Such a system generally ensures that the best research is supported. Research earmarks—in general the assignment of money during the legislative process for use only by a specific organization or project—are counter to a merit-based competitive selection process. Earmarks signal to potential investigators that there is an acceptable alternative to creating quality research proposals for merit-based consideration, including the use of political influence or appeals to parochial interests. Such an alternative is seldom the most effective use of taxpayer funds.

Unfortunately, the practice of earmarking to colleges, universities and other entities for specific research projects has expanded dramatically in recent years. The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) recently estimated that R&D earmarks total \$2.1 billion in 2005, an increase of nine percent over the Association's 2004 estimate. Some argue that earmarks help spread the research money to states or institutions that would receive less research funding through other means. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reports that this is not the main role earmarks play; often only a minor portion of academic earmark funding goes to the states with the smallest shares of Federal research funds. Meanwhile, earmarks help some rich institutions become richer. Some proponents of earmarking assert that earmarks provide a means of funding unique projects that would not be recognized by the conventional peer-review process. To address this concern, a number of research agencies have procedures and programs to reward "out-of-the-box" thinking. For example, within the Department of Defense (DoD), the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency seeks out high-risk, high-payoff scientific proposals, and program managers at the National Science Foundation (NSF) set aside a share of funding for higher-risk projects in which they see exciting potential.

Often Congressional direction has little to do with an agency's mission. In addition to earmarked funding noted above, the Congress also directed DoD to fund research on a wide range of diseases, including breast cancer, ovarian cancer, prostate cancer, diabetes, leukemia, and muscular dystrophy. Funding at DoD for such research totals about \$900 million in 2005 alone, an increase of about \$200 million in just one year. While research on these diseases is very important, it is generally not unique to the U.S. military and can be better carried out and coordinated within civilian medical research agencies, without disruption to the military mission. At the same time, intrusion of earmarks into the peer-review processes of civilian medical research agencies would have a significant detrimental impact on funding the most important and promising research.

The Administration will continue to work with the Congress, academic organizations, colleges and universities to discourage the practice of research earmarks and to achieve our common objective of the best science and technology program for the American taxpayer who are funding it.