

FY 2009 Omnibus – Notable Policy Items

(Prepared by the House Appropriations Committee – Republican Staff)

Once again, the Democrat majority is using a massive spending bill to **shove sweeping national policy changes through the Congress without public scrutiny and proper debate**. The following are examples of several notable and/or controversial provisions included in FY 2009 Omnibus Appropriations bill.

Census – The bill provides \$2.9 billion for the costs of conducting the 2010 decennial census, which is being “supervised” by the White House. However, the “stimulus” bill already provided an additional, unrequested \$1 billion for even more 2010 census personnel, training, and outreach efforts.

Yucca Mountain – This project receives \$388.4 million in the bill, which is \$106.4 million below the request. This large cut is intended halt all construction and design, while allowing the application process within the Department of Energy to continue.

New House Office Building – Driven by Speaker Pelosi, this bill contains \$15 million for a new House Office Building.

DC School Vouchers – The bill contains language to terminate the District of Columbia school voucher program. It prohibits any new students from receiving vouchers, and makes the 2009 – 2010 school year the last year of the program.

Federal Benefits to Domestic Partnerships - Language to “consider” federal health benefits for same-sex domestic partners of federal employees is included in the bill report. This is not in the text of the bill itself.

Cuba Travel Restrictions – The bill weakens existing travel restrictions to Cuba – including lifting the “family travel” limitation to immediate family members, and the travel limit of once every three years. The language included in the Omnibus also eliminates the “cash-in-advance” requirement for deliveries for agriculture and medical supplies, and allows travel without license for agriculture and medical marketing and sales.

Fairness Doctrine – The FY 09 Omnibus drops a previous provision to prohibit the implementation of the “fairness doctrine.” While this provision is not included, there will essentially be no legal change as the “fairness doctrine” is not currently in law. However, the inclusion of this provision would have safeguarded against any future attempts to renew this policy.

Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Drilling Moratorium – The Omnibus DOES NOT contain a moratorium on OCS drilling.

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) – Even with the additional \$50 million for the NEA provided in the “stimulus” bill, the Omnibus provides \$310 million for these programs - an increase of \$21 million over 2008 levels.

Millennium Challenge Corporation – The bill contains \$875 million for the MCC – a cut \$1.35 billion below the President’s request and \$669 million below 2008 level. This large cut could jeopardize new developing international compacts overseen by the agency.

Family Planning – The Omnibus provides \$545 million - \$88 million above 2008, for family planning activities overseen by the State Department. This includes spending for the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) for contraceptives and other family planning purposes. This money will be available even if the UNFPA is found to have participated in abortions or other coercive practices in foreign countries.

Airline “Slot” Auctions – The bill contains language to prohibit “slot auctions” for airlines to purchase space (“slots”) for take-offs and landings in congested airports.

Highway Funding Rescission – The bill rescinds \$3.15 billion in highway money from the states from prior year unobligated funds.

Mexican Trucks – The bill halts the cross-border trucking pilot program under the Department of Transportation. However, this may be a violation of NAFTA and could spur Mexico to implement sanctions against the U.S.

Housing Counseling – The bill provides \$245 million for “housing counseling” programs overseen by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the National Reinvestment Corporation (NRC). ACORN has been a recipient of these funds in the past.

Reading First – The FY 09 Omnibus eliminates the “Reading First” program within the Department of Education. The purpose of the program is to ensure that all U.S. children learn to read well by the end of the third grade. The program has been widely supported for its emphasis on raising reading achievement, especially among low-income children.

Nominal Drug Pricing – A provision in the Omnibus allows non-federally funded family planning clinics (such as Planned Parenthood and university health clinics) to purchase drugs at a “nominal” price - including contraceptives and “morning-after-pills.” Those clinics are then able to resell these drugs at higher prices for profit.

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