

# Operation Wildfire: Good Things Happen When YOU Vote

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## The Media, the Message and the \$1.5 Trillion Spending Bill

With so much news about Russia, Ukraine, China, the rising costs of gas and groceries, as well as Hunter Biden's laptop, very little has been reported about what is probably the most important thing that happened in Congress this year: The \$1.5 trillion spending bill passed by Congress and signed by President Biden on March 16, 2022. The sprawling 2,741-page omnibus bill – the first major federal spending package this year – also funds the government through September 30, 2022, the end of the federal fiscal year, and averted a partial government shutdown.

Both print and electronic media reported that the omnibus bill contains \$13.6 billion in aid to Ukraine. That's true. They also reported that the bill passed with bipartisan support. That's true as well.

But many of their stories led with the false narrative that Republicans voted against aiding Ukraine. The *American Independent* reported that the "Majority of GOP senators vote against helping Ukraine." The Democratic National Committee got in on the action, too: "Senate Republicans who voted no were threatening to leave our allies out to dry in the face of Russia's horrific attacks by delaying aid." Even "The View" couldn't pass up the opportunity to claim that Republicans were "engaging in political posturing and united in opposing aid for Ukraine."

None of those statements are true, but that's how the vote is being spun. Unfortunately, that's what you'll probably hear from now until the November elections. And that's why we've developed this piece to help you sort through the spin and make up your own mind.

Did the mainstream media ask why Republican Senators voted against the legislation and then report their response? We had difficulty finding a single instance in which they did. What we did find were two recurring themes from those who voted against the bill:

- Ukraine is in dire need of support, and the Senators who voted against the legislation, as Senator Pat Toomey (R-PA) stated "fully endorse providing additional funding as they fight for their lives." A standalone bill for financial support for Ukraine "could have passed with overwhelming support and shown the U.S. commitment to the people of Ukraine." Instead, it was tied to a bill more than 100 times larger than the aid.
- The omnibus bill included excessive spending and the first use of earmarks in over a decade. The bill circumvents what should be a deliberate process and removes Congress' ability to review and amend individual spending items. Senator Toomey noted "For the sake of America's fiscal health, I could not support this bill."

Do you know what's in the Omnibus Spending Bill? Here's just the tip of the iceberg:

### The Omnibus Bill

The Republican Senators voted not against aid to Ukraine; instead, they voted against the inflation-busting \$1.5 trillion budget. The aid to Ukraine is less than one percent of the total. So what's in the legislation? Here are a few of the many line items in the omnibus spending bill:

- \$14.1 billion for the Interior Department, a \$776 million increase for more robust conservation efforts and to launch a Civilian Climate Corps.
- \$100 million for environmental justice programs, according to a fact sheet, an increase of over 12 million from current spending.
- \$539 million for environmental monitoring and compliance work.

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- \$92 million for diesel emissions reduction grants, a \$2 million increase.
- \$587 million for geographic conservation programs like efforts to preserve the Chesapeake Bay.
- \$774.4 million for House lawmakers' budgets to give congressional staff a raise. It also provides \$18.2 million in funding for interns.
- \$675 million increase in the IRS budget, the largest in two decades.
- \$845 million for the Strategic National Stockpile (an increase of \$140 million) and \$745 million for the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (an increase of \$148 million) to prepare for another pandemic.
- \$602.5 million for the U.S. Capitol Police, an increase of \$87 million, to help hire more officers and civilian staff as a response to January 6.
- \$12.5 million for firearm injury and prevention research.
- \$2 billion of border wall funding (no new money allocated).
- \$5 million to the survivors of a drone strike in Afghanistan that killed ten civilians.
- \$75 million for election security grants to bolster state efforts to improve integrity of elections for federal office. \$20 million of operating expenses for the Election Assistance Commission, an increase of \$3 million.
- \$180 million each for the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.
- \$370 million for enhanced security in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia and Oman.
- Up to \$500 million, specifically designated for Jordan and its military to enhance security along its border.
- 2.7% pay increase for all 2.1 million uniformed military members.
- Funding for thirteen new Navy vessels, a dozen F/A-18 Super Hornets and 85 F-35 Joint Strike Fighters.
- An additional 1.45 billion for Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to handle migrant crossings on the Southern border. The money will go to overtime costs for staff, medical care for migrants and funding for nonprofits that shelter migrants.

The bill also:

- Unlocks funding from the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill, meaning bridge and road repairs are about to get moving.
- Re-authorizes the Violence Against Women Act.
- Closes a loophole on e-cigs that allowed manufacturers to avoid strict FDA regulation.

### Earmarks

But perhaps most important of all, the bill ushers in the return of earmarks. Earmarks are sometimes called member-directed spending, pork, pork barrel spending, etc. Generally speaking, earmarks are funding or projects in members' districts that get inserted into legislation at the request of a Senator or Representative in an effort to earn that member's vote.

The return of earmarks means that Senators and Representatives are once again able to slip pet projects into major legislation like this (or use them as a negotiating tactic). When they do that, it's commonly called a "Christmas Tree," with the earmarks hanging on major legislation like shiny holiday ornaments on an evergreen.

Support for bringing back earmarks is at its highest since the earmark ban was enacted in 2011 after Republicans took control of the U.S. House of Representatives, according to the budget watchdog groups Taxpayers for Common Sense and Citizens Against Government Waste.

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Lawmakers from both sides of the aisle said they supported the change, saying it would make it easier to reach bipartisan deals in Congress. “I’ve always been supportive of making sure members of Congress have an opportunity to put funding into appropriations bills that work for their state,” said Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA). “That’s part of our job — to fight for our state.”

Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) said the restoration of earmarks would “help rectify what has been an enormous shift in power from Congress to the Executive branch over the past 10 years.”

According to *The Hill*, citing a report being circulated among Senate Republicans, the 2,741-page Omnibus Spending Bill includes more than 4,000 earmarks. Senator Mike Braun (R-IN), an earmark opponent whose office has been tallying up the projects included in the Omnibus Bill, claims the final total is about \$8 billion.

From Issac Saul of the *American Independent*: “The best argument for restoring earmarks is that Congress has been slowly abdicating its responsibility to the presidency. Consolidated, unchecked executive power is a great concern — and it should be one of yours, too. From Bush to Obama to Trump and now Biden, presidential power is running more unchecked every term. Starting wars, spending tax dollars and signing executive orders in the place of legislating is the new norm on both sides.”

He further notes, “The last time Congress had earmarks, some members were trading those dollars for campaign contributions, lobbyists were begging for earmarked cash in exchange for campaign support, and entire firms were created to help facilitate these transactions. Congress had its chance to earmark responsibly and blew it — that they can’t legislate now is no reason to reward them for the crimes of the past.”

Are earmarks good or bad? We hope we’ve provided enough information to help you make that decision, or to do additional research on your own.

## **What You Can Do**

Monitor media reporting and hold them accountable. Letters to the Editor of your local paper and emails to various media outlets can help to make your voice heard.

Do the research. Follow the issues that matter to you — monitor a Congressional Committee website, follow legislation as it winds its way through Congress.

Share information you find with your family, friends, neighbors and co-workers, and encourage them to do the same. Share the spin, then share the truth.

Stay in touch with your U.S. Senators and U.S. Representative on a regular basis to learn what’s happening on Capitol Hill. Don’t forget to send emails to them, too. (You can, and should, do the same with your State Senator and State Representative in Harrisburg.)

## **It’s Not Too Late!**

Do you have a comment on the Omnibus Spending Bill and/or on the return of earmarks? Contact your U.S. Senators and U.S. Representative and make your voice heard!

Sources: *Tangent*, *American Independent*, U.S. Senator Tom Cotton Twitter Feed, U.S. Senator Pat Toomey Press Release, *Daily Wire*, *Politico*, *The Hill*, CBS News