



Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on December 6, 2010

Don't Nap Yet: Tea Party Caucus Members Request \$1 Billion in Earmarks

The December 2 *National Journal* reported this head-shaker: Tea Party Caucus members requested earmarks. Of the 52 members, only 16 did not request them in 2010. The 764 requests of the others added up to more than \$1 billion.

For a group that's had enough of government spending and bureaucracy, the trough jostling seems a surprise.

Washington-based [Citizens Against Government Waste](#) (CAGW), described by Wikipedia as a "think-tank and government watchdog for fiscal conservatism," compiled a list revealing Tea Party requests in its popular "Pig Book." David Williams, policy vice president at CAGW, commented:



It's disturbing to see the Tea Party Caucus requested that much in earmarks. This is their time to put up or shut up, to be blunt. There's going to be a huge backlash if they continue to request earmarks.

Michelle Bachman (R-Minn.) founded the Caucus in July, giving voice to Americans sick of government overspending. In a July 15 statement, she declared:

The American people are speaking out loud and clear. They have had enough of the spending, the bureaucracy, and the government knows best mentality running rampant today throughout the halls of Congress.

In a letter to House Administration Committee chairman Bob Brady, Bachman explained:

The [Caucus] will serve as an informal group of Members dedicated to promote Americans' call for fiscal responsibility, adherence to the Constitution, and limited government.

Though Bachman did not request any earmarks herself, many wonder about the thinking of those in the Tea Party caucus who did.

Earmarks are simply federal funds going to specific districts for specific companies or projects. According to the Constitution, the uses approved for federal funds are few and defined, not the myriad called for by the 36 Tea Party Caucus members. More than one member can sign on to an earmark, and some on the Pig Book list signed liberally. Top pig prize went to Montana Republican Denny Rehberg, whose name was attached to 88 earmarks, totaling \$100,514,200.

The *National Journal* contacted the offices of these Tea Partiers for comment, but many did not immediately respond. Those who did said they supported Republicans' new efforts to ban earmarks.

Louisiana Republican Rodney Alexander, for example, whose 2010 requests numbered 41, hasn't submitted any earmarks since joining the Caucus in July, and has withdrawn his outstanding requests in



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the most recent Water Resources Development Act. Jamie Hanks, his communications director, indicated that he stands with his fellow Republicans in the House in supporting the current earmark ban.

Republican Gregg Harper of Mississippi has agreed to do the same, asserted spokesman Adam Buckalew:

He supported the moratorium and the prohibition adopted recently by the Conference on House earmarks for the 112th Congress.

But even top pig-prize winner Denny Rehberg said it was easy to be a member of the Tea Party Caucus, because

Like them, I agree that we're Taxed Enough Already and we've got to balance the budget by cutting spending instead of raising taxes. Deficit spending is not new, but the unprecedented rate of spending in Congress is.

In a statement e-mailed by his office, Rehberg continued:

Montanans have tightened their belts, and it's way past time for Congress to follow their lead. The Tea Party Caucus is about listening to concerned Americans who want to fundamentally change how Congress spends their tax dollars. On that, we're in total agreement.

Constituents in districts of those who muzzled themselves should commend their Representatives. But true constitutionalists still say: If Tea Partiers really understood this constitutional bandwagon they've jumped on, they wouldn't have asked for earmarks in the first place. Many believe the bandwagon is hauling around some folks who were simply blown on board by political winds, and have no real commitment to constitutional ideals. No constitutional authority is to be found for earmarking, and that is the appropriate question.

Since it looks as if an informed electorate will have to educate its legislators, then let that electorate begin by informing those who at least *claim* they'll live by the rules.

The *National Journal* concluded:

Still, some Republicans — albeit none who belong to the Tea Party caucus — have said they will not abide by the voluntary earmark ban. And, said CAGW's Williams, the anti-spending organization isn't waiting with bated breath.

"Seeing is believing. It's going to take a lot more than rhetoric to convince us."

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