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Obama's Huge Stimulus Rewarding Democratic Strongholds

Thursday, July 9, 2009 12:58 PM

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Billions of dollars in federal stimulus money targeted to boost local economies have gone overwhelmingly to counties that supported Barack Obama in last year's presidential election.

Counties that supported the Democratic candidate have received twice as much money per person from the administration's \$787 billion economic stimulus package as those that voted for Republican John McCain, according to a USA Today analysis.

Obama administration officials are denying a political motivation behind the billions flowing disproportionately to regions that supported Obama on Election Day.

"There's no politics at work when it comes to spending for the recovery," White House spokesman Robert Gibbs told USA Today.

Government reports show that the 872 counties that backed Obama received about \$69 per person on average, while the 2,234 counties that backed McCain received about \$34 per person.

The Obama administration has so far allocated about \$158 billion to various projects, and most of it has gone directly to state governments for dispersal. Washington has also distributed \$17 billion directly to local communities, allowing the comparison of moneys allocated versus votes cast.

"Including the larger chunk of money given to state governments, the aid favors states that voted for Obama, which have received about 20 percent more per person," USA Today reported.

The aid includes money to repair military facilities, improve public housing, and help students pay for college.

Jake Wiens, an investigator with the non-profit Project on Government Oversight, told the newspaper it's too early to "draw meaningful conclusions" about whether the aid in the stimulus favors Obama's constituents. But he added that "it will be important to pay close attention as the data come in to ensure that political favoritism plays no role."

The \$17 billion is aimed at repairing military facilities, improving public housing, and helping students pay for college.

CATO budget analyst Tad DeHaven says it is too early to conclude there has been a pro-Obama bias in the distribution of stimulus funds. But he says the disparity raises a larger question about the inevitable politicization of massive government stimulus programs.



He points to a New York Times report on Thursday showing that transportation funds in the stimulus bill are going disproportionately to rural areas, rather than the metropolitan jurisdictions where about two-thirds of Americans now live.

Reports the Times: "The stimulus law provided \$26.6 billion for highways, bridges and other transportation projects, but left the decision on how to spend most of it to the states, which have a long history of giving short shrift to major metropolitan areas when it comes to dividing federal transportation money."

That the stimulus plan has become a political football, both inside and outside the Beltway, highlights its serious limitations, DeHaven says.

"All of these formulas – Medicaid, how they distribute education dollars – these formulas are all politically driven," DeHaven tells Newsmax. "And whether you want to call it back scratching or log rolling, the tendency to get things done to grease the wheel is to make sure everyone gets a piece of the cheese. So the whole process is politically driven."

"Do I think there's a concentrated effort to push stimulus money into Obama-friendly hands?" asks DeHaven. "I would say not necessarily. But supporters of all of these programs are proponents of a bigger, more activist government."

DeHaven says political distortions are important to keep in mind as talk surfaces that Congress may entertain yet another stimulus bill – an idea the White House has shied away from for the time being.

"It certainly seems like some trial balloons are being floated," DeHaven says. "And my guess is they're getting a ton of pressure from the states, especially those such as California."

Bailing out the deficit-plagued states has been the real thrust behind the massive stimulus plans, DeHaven says, which are being dressed up as economic-stimulus proposals.

"Some states still haven't gotten the message that it's time to reform their budgets," DeHaven tells Newsmax. "Certainly the dependency on Washington is alive and well."

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