



Obama's Pets, Education and Infrastructure, Already Overfinanced

by **Donald Lambro** ([more by this author](#))

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Listening to President Obama talk about the need to spend more tax dollars on education and infrastructure projects, Americans would think these programs have been almost starved to death.

They have become Obama's all-purpose rhetorical firewall that he exploits to his political advantage whenever GOP leaders begin talking tough about cutting spending. Those mean old Republicans would shut down education programs for little Jimmy and Annie and end infrastructure programs that will yield millions of jobs someday, he says.

"We need a government that lives within its means," says the king of trillion-dollar deficits, "without sacrificing job-creating investments in education, innovation and infrastructure."

Obama incessantly demagogues about these programs that he wants us to believe are shriveled and ill-nourished orphans of a Scrooge-like government. In fact, for many decades these two programs have been lavishly financed to the point where they have among the fastest-growing budgets in Washington.

"Since 2000, Washington has tripled K-12 education and Pell Grant spending, even after adjusting for inflation. Federal transportation spending has risen 70% faster than inflation. And nearly half of this spending growth has occurred in the past two years under President Obama," says Brian Riedl, chief budget analyst at The Heritage Foundation.

"Federal education and infrastructure spending have grown at completely unsustainable rates. The economic reality is that Washington cannot continue to double and triple the budgets of major programs. Even the modest Republican

reforms would still leave these programs at near-record funding levels,” Riedl told Human Events.

Phony Taxpayer Return

Notice Obama never uses the word “spending” when he talks about shoveling more money into these and other budgetary black holes. He prefers the softer, more enriching word “investments,” which suggests that taxpayers will reap a huge return on their hard-earned taxes.

Unfortunately, historically low SAT scores and the increasing number of failing public schools show that more money doesn't necessarily mean a higher return in achievement levels. Since 2005, the SAT's national average scores have dropped seven points to 501 in reading, four points in math to 516 and five points in writing to 492.

And the promises behind the billions that Obama is pouring into “infrastructure” projects would make even Bernie Madoff blush with embarrassment.

Oh yes, they may or may not yield a big return down the road, just not in your lifetime.

But Obama doesn't deal in spending specifics or even in results when he talks about “investing” in such programs. He generally deals in the kind of wildly exaggerated generalities that have gotten him where he is today.

“Getting our fiscal house in order can't just be something we use as cover to do away with things we dislike politically. And it can't be about how much we cut. It's got to be about how we cut and how we invest. We've got to be smart about it,” Obama said in one of his weekly radio addresses last month.

Countless Programs

But no amount of generalities can erase the sheer irresponsibility of raising budgets by triple digits while the nation is so deeply in debt and then talking about being “smart” about budget cuts to get our fiscal house in order, while also insisting that “it can't be about how much we cut.” Huh?

A Heritage Foundation study of spending increases found that K-12 education spending has surged 219% since 2000, climbing virtually straight up under Obama

from \$40 billion in 2008 to \$84 billion in 2010.

Obama's dream of high-speed rail systems across the country has been one of the biggest spending jackpots since he launched his waste-ridden \$800 billion stimulus/infrastructure plan that has created so few jobs in the U.S. economy but ballooned the budgets of countless government programs.

He proposed a \$53 billion plan for more high-speed rail lines over the next decade that would be bankrolled by a federal gas tax and "a new energy tax." It also was to include "\$250 billion for highways, \$120 billion for urban transit, \$27 billion for 'livability,' and \$25 billion for an infrastructure bank," according to high-speed rail critic Randal O'Toole at the Cato Institute.

But many studies have shown that such high-speed trains have poor ridership, cannot pay for themselves and end up imposing huge costs on federal, state and local taxpayers. Florida Gov. Rick Scott was so unimpressed with the idea that he turned down \$2.4 billion for an Orlando-Tampa line. That money was then redistributed among other rail lines from California to Amtrak's money-losing Northeast Corridor.

The larger high-speed plan is considered dead, but not by the Obama administration, which continues to push infrastructure projects that critics says will waste tens of billions of dollars.

In the meantime, Riedl says, "Spending and deficits continue to grow at a pace not seen since World War II."

Total annual federal spending nears \$4 trillion this year, while the deficit is expected to hit a record \$1.6 trillion, further swelling an already \$14 trillion public debt. That debt is expected to rise over this decade by \$7.2 trillion under Obama's spending policies, according to Heritage Foundation economist J.D. Foster.

Double-Talk Obfuscation

But Obama continues to dismiss these bleak numbers in a stream of contradictory double-talk, as he did in his proposed fiscal 2012 budget proposals: "Rather than fight the same tired battles that have dominated Washington for decades, it's time to try something new. Let's invest in our people without leaving them a mountain of debt." Say what?

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