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Ryan and Pork

By [STEPHEN MOORE](#) / August 20, 2012

The latest media attack on GOP Rep. Paul Ryan is that he's a fiscal fraud because he says he is for leaner government but seeks pork barrel projects for his district in Wisconsin.

The Washington Post reported this weekend that during his tenure in Congress, Mitt Romney's running mate has sought earmarks for airport runway extensions, green energy projects, and even economic development funds from the Obama stimulus bill. As the Post puts it: "Ryan has often used the powers of his office to seek federal funds for his district"—the horror! The story then says that though there is "nothing improper or even unusual about what Ryan has done," the spending requests "complicate the image" of the Wisconsin congressman as a "single-minded fiscal hawk."

But does it really? Even the Post acknowledges that Mr. Ryan has opposed most of the big spending bills of the past five years, even when they have included money for his own district. He also has requested fewer earmarks than most members. Then there is the broader issue of whether it is advisable for Republicans who are opposed to pork to unilaterally disarm and allow all the construction and research dollars to go to Democratic districts.

David Boaz of the libertarian Cato Institute answers that question by saying that while Mr. Ryan has some bad votes on spending—TARP, auto bailouts, Medicare prescription drugs—earmarks may not be the best way to judge a congressman's fiscal conservatism.

"The question is, Did he vote against excessive spending?" says Mr. Boaz. "Sure, it might be best if fiscal conservatives crossed their arms and refused to participate in the standard congressional practice of seeking federal funds for one's own district or state. But that's not likely to happen in a political world where members of Congress assume that 'bringing home the bacon' is essential to re-election."

The Obama stimulus bill is a good example. Mr. Ryan not only opposed the legislation but led the fight against it. Budget expert Peter Ferrara adds that "there has been no one who has been more of a fiscal hawk on entitlements"—where the real money is—"in this Congress than Paul Ryan. No one."

Mr. Boaz says that the complaints from the Washington Post and others about Paul Ryan's votes for his district are mostly unfair. When a politician has "passed one of the few congressional acts to actually push back against spending," he says, "and developed a budget plan that would arguably bring the rate of spending increase down from stratospheric to merely exorbitant, he should get some credit for that." He should, but given the media love affair with Barack Obama, he probably won't.