



Earmark recipients filled Akin campaign coffers

By Mark Tapscott and Jennifer Peebles



Rep. Todd Akin is in a close contest with former state treasurer Sarah Steelman and businessman John Brunner for the Republican Senate nomination against incumbent Democrat, Sen. Claire McCaskill.

People for whom [U.S. Rep. Todd Akin](#) helped secure \$31 million in earmarks have paid him back handsomely: The Missouri Republican has raked in nearly \$80,000 in campaign cash from people tied to those firms.

The five-term representative is in a hotly contested primary race for the Republican nomination to oppose incumbent Democrat [Sen. Claire McCaskill](#), one of the Senate's most ardent earmark foes.

Political observers view the Missouri Senate race as one of a half dozen that are critical to Republican efforts to regain a majority in the upper chamber in 2012. The Senate is currently split 53-47, with Democrats in the majority.

Most surveys have Akin trailing by five to eight points behind [former state treasurer Sarah Steelman](#) but leading businessman [John Brunner](#). The primary is Aug. 7.

"The fact that Rep. Akin got campaign contributions from people working at companies that he got earmarks for serves as a vivid reminder of why we have the earmark moratorium and how it's important," said Steve Ellis, vice president of the independent advocacy group [Taxpayers for Common Sense](#).

"In three short years, these companies got \$31 million worth of earmarks while handing over \$78,000 in campaign contributions. Not a bad return on investment," Ellis said.

Akin received at least \$79,250 in campaign contributions from 13 individuals associated with 11 firms for which he sponsored or co-sponsored earmarks, according to a *Washington Examiner* analysis of campaign finance and earmark data. (See below for spreadsheets of campaign contributions to Akin from individuals associated with earmark recipients and the earmarks he sponsored.)

One of the firms that got an Akin earmark, St. Louis-based [Clean Earth Technologies](#), is one of the congressman's all-time biggest donors, according to the nonpartisan [Center for Responsive Politics](#). Another is a firm that was linked to a scandal involving a former aide to powerful [U.S. Rep. John Murtha, D-Pa.](#)

Steve Taylor, a spokesman for Akin, defended the earmarking practice to the *Examiner*. "Congressman Akin has made amendments for defense research and development to improve military capability and troop survivability. I am most certain that the marks you are referring to are such amendments and related to increased military capability."

He declined further comment.

Since 2008 -- the year Congress began requiring public disclosure of earmarks -- Akin has sponsored 15 earmarks solo and 46 earmarks in concert with other members of Congress, worth a total of \$157 million, according to LegiStorm.com and Taxpayers for Common Sense.

Earmarks are measures sponsored or co-sponsored by individual senators and representatives to direct spending to particular programs, institutions or projects, usually in their home state or district. They are typically included as amendments to major appropriation measures covering multiple federal departments and agencies.

Congressmen use earmarks to shortcut competitive procurement rules governing most federal spending. An earmark moratorium was declared in 2011 in response to public outrage in 2005 during the Bush administration over revelations like that of the [Bridge to Nowhere](#) in Alaska.

More than 10,000 in earmarks worth in excess of \$31 billion were included in the 2010 federal budget. Earmark critics say they are too often used by congressmen to reward campaign donors, enrich family members or aid businesses connected with former staff members.

Akin received \$32,250 in contributions from five Clean Earth Technologies executives between 2005 and 2010. He individually sponsored a \$1.6 million earmark for the firm in 2008, another for the same amount in 2009 and a third for that amount in 2010.

All three of the Clean Earth earmarks sponsored by Akin were for research and development of advanced night vision equipment for the military.

"This is a very judicious use of taxpayer funds, as it allows the DOD to significantly enhance existing capability for a very small investment," according to Jim Harper of the Cato Institute's washingtonwatch.com website.

Cato is a libertarian think tank in the nation's capital that supports significant reductions in defense spending.

New Jersey-based DRS Technologies received an Akin-sponsored earmark for \$1 million in 2008 that was co-sponsored by fellow Missouri Republicans [Sen. Kit Bond](#) and [Rep. Jo Ann Emerson](#). The purpose of the earmark was to fund development of the Chemical Biological Protective Shelter, which would protect military medical

personnel from contamination in the field.

Akin has received \$18,500 in campaign contributions from a DRS political action committee (PAC) since the 2008 election cycle.

He also got a \$1,000 contribution on March 30, 2007, from DRS executive officer Thomas Cornwell, and \$500 on the same date from another DRS executive, Karen Bedell, according to [Federal Election Commission](#) records for contributions by individuals listing DRS Technologies as their employers.

Ellis noted that DRS was linked closely with the [PMA Group](#), a Washington lobbying firm that helped arrange hundreds of millions of dollars in earmarks, mostly for defense-related firms.

PMA Group's principal was Paul Magglochetti, a former top aide to Murtha. The firm disbanded following Magglochetti's 2011 conviction "for making hundreds of thousands of dollars in illegal campaign contributions and making false statements to a federal agency," according to the FBI.

Magglochetti's firm was paid \$130,000 by DRS for lobbying services in 2009 and \$560,000 in 2008, according to OpenSecrets.org.

DRS Technologies is also the subject of four entries in the [Federal Contractor Misconduct Database](#) maintained by the [Project on Government Oversight](#).

In one case, it paid \$7.5 million to settle a lawsuit filed by competitors who alleged the firm stole trade secrets after hiring away the competitor's engineers. During the trial, one of DRS' attorneys was hit with [a rare lifetime ban](#) from the courtroom of the federal judge hearing the case, who accused the lawyer of lying.

In another case, a DRS subsidiary repaid the government \$2.5 million after it admitted it had falsely told the Army it had tested equipment used to align the sights on guns and rocket launchers on the Apache attack helicopter, according to a summary in [the legal journal of the group Taxpayers Against Fraud](#).

DRS Technologies was bought in 2008 for \$5.2 billion by the Italian aerospace firm Finmeccanica.

Another earmark critic warned that the days of the current earmark moratorium may be

numbered.

"This is exactly the problem in Washington. Politicians give earmarks (to people) who, in turn, then can use that money to make contributions to the politicians who earmarked for them," said Melanie Sloan, executive director for the group [Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington](#).

"And, so, it's a circle. Politicians give them the money, and then politicians get the money," she said.

Some members of Congress want that circle to come back, she said, and there's already talk that the earmark moratorium will be done away with next year.

McCaskill, by contrast, "has been an anti-earmark crusader," Sloan said. "She's the biggest one in the Senate, really. In the House, it's been (Arizona Republican) [Jeff Flake](#)."

During a debate in February, Steelman criticized Akin's earmarks, saying, "I honestly think any Republican who wants to be taken seriously about getting the budget under control but still supports the practice of earmarks isn't a serious candidate."

Likewise, Brunner has vowed not to sponsor earmarks if he goes to the Senate because "politicians of both parties have squandered away our tax dollars on some of the most ridiculous and wasteful special interest projects imaginable."

Mark Tapscott is executive editor of The Washington Examiner. Jennifer Peebles is the newspaper's data editor.