

The Truth-O-Meter Says:



Earmarks requested in a federal spending bill included "\$277,000 for potato pest management in Wisconsin."

[John McCain](#) on Tuesday, December 14th, 2010 in a statement on the U.S. Senate floor

John McCain says a federal spending bill included a \$277,000 request for potato pest management in Wisconsin

One bit of conventional wisdom gleaned from the November 2010 elections is voters turned Democrats out of office in Washington because they were turned off by their spending.



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The results, no doubt, were more complicated than that.

But even if spending were only one reason Republicans took control of the U.S. House, would an outgoing Democratic congressman -- just weeks after his party got clobbered -- make a special federal funding request for potato pests in Wisconsin?

On Dec. 14, 2010, U.S. Sen John McCain (R-Arizona) took to the Senate floor to [blast 2011 earmark requests](#) made by various lawmakers.

An earmark is a requirement that money approved by Congress be spent in a specific way at the request of a lawmaker.

McCain, reciting with disdain some of his "favorite" requests, highlighted an earmark for "\$277,000 for potato pest management in Wisconsin."

Two days later, a 1,900-page, \$8 billion bill that included the earmarks [was abandoned](#) by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Nevada Democrat. That means the earmarks are not likely to be funded, said [Ryan Alexander](#), president of [Taxpayers for Common Sense](#) (and a University of Wisconsin Law School graduate).

Nevertheless, let's find out whether McCain's claim was on target.

The 2008 presidential candidate said his source on the earmarks he highlighted was [EndingSpending.com](#), which has a [2011 earmarks database](#).

The database was assembled by three Washington, D.C., organizations: [Taxpayers Against Earmarks](#), led by Ameritrade founder Joe Ricketts; Taxpayers for Common Sense, a nonpartisan budget watchdog group; and [WashingtonWatch.com](#), which is run by a staff member of the Cato Institute, a libertarian research foundation.

Our check of the database found that an earmark request for [\\$300,000 for potato pest management](#) in Wisconsin was made by U.S. Rep. Dave Obey (D-Wausau).

Obey, who decided not to seek re-election in November after 41 years in Congress, was regarded as one of the most powerful members as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. He'll be replaced in January by Republican Sean Duffy, a former prosecutor and lumberjack athlete.

So, did Obey request the potato money?

Yes, said Ellis Brachman, spokesman for the House Appropriations Committee. He referred us to Obey's official website, pointing out that members of Congress are required to post their earmark requests.

Obey's site does not label his requests as earmarks, but rather "Wisconsin projects submitted for consideration in FY 2011 appropriations." If you click there on Obey's [home page](#), you get a list of his more than [80 earmark requests](#).

Among them: \$36 million for studies of high-speed passenger rail between Madison and the Twin Cities; \$2.5 million to replace the Bad River Tribal Youth Center in Ashland; and millions of dollars for water or waste water system improvements in communities including Cadott, Elcho and Unity.

As for Obey's potato pest request, here's the summary:

Recipient: University of Wisconsin College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Address: 1450 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706

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About this statement:

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Sources:

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Associated Press, [Senate Democratic leader abandons nearly \\$1.3T spending bill amid GOP revolt](#), Dec. 17, 2010

University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Entomology, [New insecticide technology for control in potato insect pest management](#), 2009

Taxpayers Against Earmarks website, [About Us page](#)

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Amount: \$300,000

Description: Funding will help promote the development and adoption of bio-intensive integrated pest management practices to reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides, enhance habitat quality, develop marketplace incentives for ecologically-produced potatoes and maintain economically viable farming operations in the fragile central sands region of Northern Wisconsin.

Obey was just renewing the potato earmark request. He won \$849,000 for the same earmark from 2008 to 2010, according to [earmarks databases](#) kept by Taxpayers for Common Sense.

Just how important are potatoes in Wisconsin? The state ranks third in potato production, behind Idaho and Washington, according to the [Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association](#).

Among the threats to Wisconsin potatoes is the Colorado potato beetle, which isn't easily killed by predator bugs. It is "[the most serious insect pest](#)" found on commercially produced potatoes in the central sands area, according to the University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Entomology.

We wondered why McCain said the potato pest management request was for \$277,000, while the database he cited and Obey put the figure at \$300,000. McCain's office didn't reply to our question. However, a "[working database](#)" of 2011 earmarks maintained by U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), indicates the request was reduced to \$277,000 before being put into the bill that was ultimately abandoned.

Obey's wasn't the only potato pest management earmark request. Maine's congressional delegation asked for \$450,000 for its program, according to the Coburn database.

OK, let's return to McCain's claim.

Citing a database, the Arizona senator said an earmark request had been made for \$277,000 for potato pest management in Wisconsin. The database shows the request was made by Obey, the outgoing congressman. He doesn't dispute it. (But it's entirely possible his office considers us a pest on this issue.)

We rate McCain's statement True.

How to contact us:

We want to hear your suggestions and comments. Email the [Wisconsin Truth-O-Meter](#) with feedback and with claims you'd like to see checked. If you send us a comment, we'll assume you don't mind us publishing it unless you tell us otherwise.

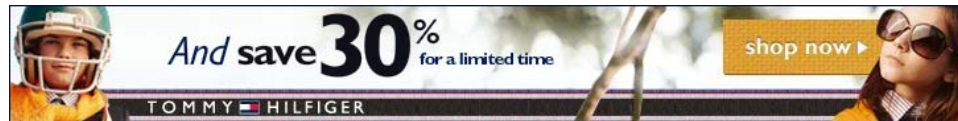
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