

Obama Likely to Sign \$1.1 Trillion Omnibus with 5,224 Earmarks, Taxpayer-Funded Abortions, Needle Exchange, White House Says

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By Fred Lucas, Staff Writer

(CNSNews.com) – President Barack Obama will likely sign the \$1.1 trillion omnibus spending package passed by the Senate over the weekend containing more than 5,000 earmarks, a White House spokesman said Monday, stressing that the number of earmarks had dropped from the previous year's spending bill.

Obama signed the 2009 omnibus bill last March. It contained 8,570 earmarks. He vowed then that the bill signing was simply wrapping up the previous year's business – a “departure point” – and that things would change under his watch.

“We can't have Congress bogged down at this critical juncture in our economic recovery,” Obama said in March. “But I also view this as a departure point for more far-reaching change. I am signing an imperfect omnibus bill because it's necessary for the ongoing functions of government, and we have a lot more work to do.”

The latest omnibus spending bill is designed to keep the government running until the end of fiscal year 2010 on Sept. 30. The watchdog group Taxpayers for Common Sense determined that this omnibus contains 5,224 earmarks.

Among the more controversial aspects, the bill would allow the District of Columbia government, which is mostly funded through federal subsidies, to pay for abortions. It also overturns a ban on needle exchanges and ends the D.C. school voucher program.

The earmarks in the bill identified by the watchdog group Citizens Against Government Waste include:

- \$400,000 for the restoration and renovation of the Ritz Theatre in Newburgh, N.Y.;
- \$1,000,000 for repairs, restoration, and modernization of a theatre and construction of an additional space at the Portsmouth Music Hall in New Hampshire;
- \$400,000 for construction and renovation for safety improvements at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden;
- \$350,000 for renovation of the Uptown Theatre in Philadelphia;
- \$250,000 for construction of the Monroe County Farmer's Market in Kentucky;
- \$194,000 for completion of the historic restoration project at the Historic Slater Mill in Pawtucket, R.I.; and,
- \$150,000 for Safe Harbors of the Hudson, Inc., for renovation and build out of the Pregones Theatre, in the Bronx.

The House and Senate passed the legislation. President Obama can sign it into law. While the president has not made a formal decision yet, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said he will likely sign it.

“I have not talked specifically with the president about whether he's going to sign the bill or not. I think the likelihood is that keeping the government running is an important thing,” Gibbs told reporters on Monday. “I think you've seen through the legislation, there are a number of things that we've done. We've made progress on that.”

When asked about Obama's earlier comment about “far-reaching change” in omnibus spending, Gibbs said, “We've seen a decrease of 15 percent in the number of earmarks. Again, it is not perfect.”

D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton boasted about the lifting of restrictions on spending for abortion services and other aspects of the bill after the House passed the measure last week.

“Today, the House took historic steps to ensure greater democracy in the nation's capital by finally allowing the District to spend its own funds to save the lives of its residents by removing the bans on local funds for needle exchange programs, as well as for abortions for low-income women, and by allowing the city to decide whether to implement a referendum to permit the use of medicinal marijuana,” Norton said in a Dec. 10 statement.

“We will never make up for the HIV/AIDS epidemic that has besieged this city because needle exchange was banned for a decade, or make

up for the resulting loss of lives," Norton said.

"There is no way to make poor women, forced to carry pregnancies to term, believe that their reproductive choice was guaranteed in the decades during the longest of the bans, on using local funds for abortions for poor women. But today we start a new chapter in democracy in the District of Columbia with the first D.C. appropriations in memory free of all un-democratic, anti-home rule riders," she added.

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