

Congress And excess

by L_Brent_Bozell

Outrage burst forth from lawmakers in Washington when the story broke that insurance giant AIG still planned to dole out \$165 million in bonuses to executives while it teeters near bankruptcy, kept afloat by taxpayers. But the outrage is mostly coming from hypocrites. Just days earlier, President Obama signed an omnibus spending bill with \$12.8 billion in self-serving earmarks for legislators during the economic crisis. How can the president and Congress lecture AIG? Don't the earmarking hogs look like hypocrites?

Liberals dismiss complaints about their drunken spending habits as just a conservative distraction. Why, it's only a couple percentage points of the omnibus spending bill. So how much of the AIG bailout is for bonuses? The company has benefited from more than \$170 billion in government bailout cash, or \$1 out of \$1,000. If the earmarks are a tiny distraction, the AIG bonuses are less than insignificant.

But no one's expecting the media to be consistent in their thinking. The same reporters who yawned past the excesses of the Democrats (and yes, the Republicans) stuffing their budget with pork — now they're outraged, positively outraged at AIG.

ABC morning anchor Chris Cuomo played up the populist anger: "Outrageous. A slap in the face. That's how lawmakers are describing insurance company AIG's decision to hand out \$165 million in bonuses after receiving \$170 billion in your money." He even allowed Republican Sen. Richard Shelby to rail against AIG, without noting that Sen. Shelby was a leading Republican at the earmark trough, with \$114 million in pet projects.

Last week, Cuomo left out the adjectives like "outrageous" as he noted Obama would sign a pile of earmark spending into law: "Despite pledging to crack down on them, President Obama today will sign a \$410-billion spending bill loaded with congressional pet projects known as earmarks. The president says he's only signing the bill to finish up last year's business. Today, he will outline a plan to curb earmarks in the future."

The media found no outrage as a Democratic-majority Congress feathered its own nest during this downturn, including no move to freeze its own automatic pay increase of \$4,700 a year for 2009. They didn't have to vote for a pay raise. They have rigged it now so the raise is automatic. Freshman Rep. Harry Mitchell, a Democrat, attempted to stop it, but it never came out of committee. Outrage, anyone?

The media largely skipped the story last week that the group Judicial Watch found that Speaker Nancy Pelosi's aides fussed about the need to have high-level military aircraft like the Gulfstream G-5 at Pelosi's beck and call: "It is my understanding there are NO G-5s available for the House during the Memorial Day recess. This is totally unacceptable ...The Speaker will want to know where the planes are," Kay King wrote. In another note, when told a certain type of aircraft would not be available, King complained: "This is not good news, and we will have some very disappointed folks, as well as a very upset speaker."

Do you remember when Pelosi pledged to clean out a Republican culture of corruption and "drain the swamp" of self-interest? That was news then. But now that she is exposed as even more corrupt? ABC, CBS, NBC and NPR all skipped the Air Pelosi story. Fox News had it, and CNN covered it "€" on the contrarian Lou Dobbs show.

Every once in a blue moon, a reporter will file a story that breaks from the pack. On Feb. 16, ABC reporter Jonathan Karl found footage of congressmen lecturing auto executives about superfluous jet travel, and then reported that members of Congress regularly travel the globe on the taxpayer's dime. Ten members and their spouses traveled via the Air Force at that time to Brussels, Vienna, Paris and the Bavarian Alps. "We asked how much this cost," Karl insisted. "But the amount taxpayers spend on military travel for Congress is a tightly guarded secret. The cheapest charter flight we could find was \$200,000. Military air would cost more. How much more? Neither Congress nor the Pentagon would tell us."

So much for the vaunted transparency of the Obama era. But it was only one story.

Karl even confronted liberal Rep. Gary Ackerman of New York about his \$14,000 in transportation costs for a trip to London. "I didn't go to England," Ackerman claimed. Karl said the record had his name on a three-day trip to Britain. Ackerman revised his remarks: "Oh, I represented the United States Congress." When asked how he spent 14 grand in taxpayer money, Ackerman blamed staff: "Whatever the airline costs, I don't book the flights."

How does this dismissive answer make Ackerman or his Congressional colleagues look any different than insensitive AIG executives?

Good for Jonathan Karl. Where is everyone else?

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