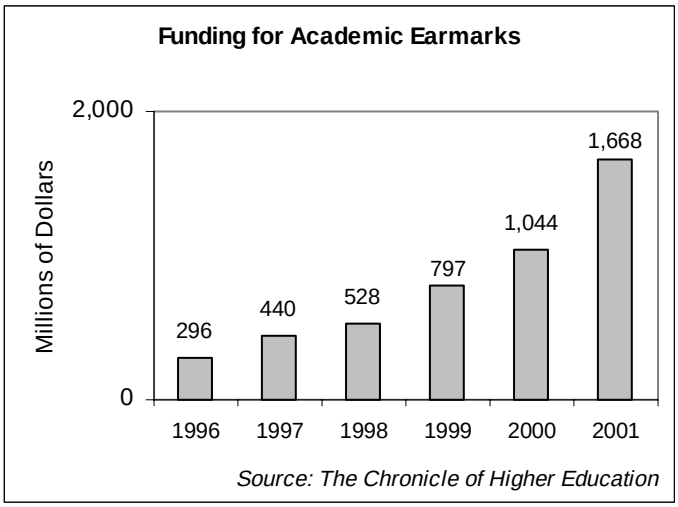
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT EARMARKS

The Administration supports awarding research funds based on merit review through a competitive process. Such a system ensures that the best research is supported. Research earmarks are counter to the competitive process of selection based on merit. The use of earmarks improperly signals to potential investigators that there is an alternative to creating quality research proposals for merit-based consideration, including the use of political influence or by appealing to parochial interests.

There is a tendency to confuse a high budget number appropriated for an agency with a good outcome for the agency, but this is often not the case. Earmarks often displace important competitive programs that have to be deferred or terminated. Earmarks for research facilities can come at the cost of operations or research at those facilities. For example, in 2002 appropriations, earmarked funding for constructing a lower priority propulsion lab at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration was paid for by cutting the very research that the lab is to support.

Many earmarks have little to do with an agency's mission. For example, in 2002, the Congress provided over $600 million to the Department of Defense's to fund research on a wide range of diseases, including breast cancer, ovarian cancer, prostate cancer, diabetes, and osteoporosis. While research on these diseases is important, it can be carried out and coordinated better in civil research agencies.

Particularly distressing is funding earmarked for specific colleges and universities or for specific projects. According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, academic earmarks have steadily increased from a level of $296 million in 1996 to an estimated $1.67 billion in 2001. These funds represent an increasing share of the total federal funding to colleges and universities, which increasingly displaces competitive research. Between 1995 and 2001, the earmarked share of federal academic funding increased from 2.5 percent to a high of 9.4 percent.



Some argue that earmarks help spread the research money to the states that would receive less research funding through other means. However, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reports that the 25 states with the largest shares of federal research dollars also received 74 percent of the earmark funding to colleges and universities.

The Administration is working with the scientific community to discourage the practice of research earmarks.