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InProfile
Wendy Ginsberg

Wendy Ginsberg is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at the University of Pennsylvania. She is currently at the Centennial Center working on her dissertation, entitled "Roll Out the Barrel: A History of Earmarks as More Than Pork, But Why There's Still Beef." The project uses qualitative and quantitative research to trace earmarking's drastic growth and its impact on the arena of juvenile justice. Specifically, the project links a loss of bureaucratic autonomy and power to the explosion of earmarks in the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s.



Earmarks are best described as anonymously authored guarantees of federal funds to particular recipients in appropriations-related documents. They allow Congress to micro-manage the power of the purse by telling executive agencies exactly which programs or projects will get public funding.

Wendy Ginsberg Earmarking gained notoriety after the conviction of Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff in 2006 and the resignation of California Rep. Randall "Duke" Cunningham in 2005. Wendy's research goes beyond the ethical concerns of pork barrel abuse and concentrates on earmarking's impact on executive-branch agencies. In the field of juvenile justice, for example, earmarks have removed the discretionary budget that technocrats once used to carve their own policy directions. Civil servants who staff the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) no longer use their area expertise to determine where public dollars would be most effective. Instead, members of Congress dole out the funding according to organizations with political access and expensive lobbyists. The project notes that not all earmarks are detrimental to executive agencies or the issue areas they inhabit. But every earmarked dollar is one fewer dollar for technocrats to use to fund progressive, coherent, and innovative programs.

Wendy uses the OJJDP as a lens through which to see earmarking's impact on the ground level. Quantitative regression analysis of federal budget documents is used to determine why earmarks are burgeoning. Process tracing methods are heavily used to piece together the political history of the agency from its 1974 inception through its current earmark-induced stalemate. Overall, the project combines research on public administration, congressional polarization, and gridlock and executive branch politicization to unpack the benefits and hazards

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