

Republicans Love Government Spending. Listen to What They Say at Hearings.

I am a fan of Kimberley Strassel's columns about federal politics in the *Wall Street Journal*. But [her recent column](#) about the omnibus spending bill—which increased spending [13 percent](#) in one year—was off the mark.

Strassel suggested that Trump and the Republicans did not want to increase spending that much, but the Democrats forced them into it. Trump “felt pressured to sign it,” while the “Democrats used the bill to hold the military hostage to their own domestic boondoggles.”

Watching Congress in recent years, I have concluded something different. The real problem is that most Republicans support higher spending on nearly all programs. The problem is not that Democrats push them into accepting higher spending. Most Republicans want it, and that is why majorities of them in the House and Senate voted for the omnibus.

President Trump [proposed](#) an array of spending cuts in his 2019 budget. He proposed cutting subsidies for agriculture, community development, economic development, education, energy, foreign aid, housing, urban transit, and many other things. How many congressional Republicans—let alone GOP leaders—have you seen actively pushing those cuts? Very few I would guess, with the exception some members pushing to cut subsidies for Planned Parenthood.

Recent congressional hearings on Trump's budget reveal broad GOP support for spending increases, and virtually no support for his proposed cuts. Cabinet secretaries have been testifying to House appropriations subcommittees on the president's budget, and each committee member is generally

given five minutes to make comments.

My intern, John Postiglione, watched seven of these recent hearings and took notes on what each Republican member said. (Hearing details are below).

Here is what John found:

- Not a single Republican made a supportive comment about a specific Trump spending cut during the seven hearings. These hearings included 47 speaking time slots by 26 different Republican members (members can be on multiple subcommittees).
- Numerous Republicans objected to Trump's proposed cuts. In the Commerce hearing, Hal Rogers (R-KY) and Evan Jenkins (R-WVA) opposed cuts to the Economic Development Administration (EDA). In the Education hearing, Tom Cole (R-OK) opposed cuts to impact aid, academic enrichment grants, and other subsidies. In the Energy hearing, Jaime Beutler (R-WA) opposed privatizing the power marketing administrations, while Dan Newhouse (R-WA) opposed cuts to energy subsidies. In the HUD hearing, David Valadao (R-CA) opposed cuts to community development. In the Labor hearing, Cole and Chuck Fleischmann (R-TN) opposed cuts to Job Corps. In the Health and Human Services hearing, Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ) opposed cuts to numerous programs.
- Many Republicans made comments supportive of various federal spending activities, particularly on programs they viewed as important to their districts.

The comments opposing Trump's cuts were sometimes subtle, but it was clear what side the member came down on. Some comments were not subtle. Here is Hal Rogers in the Commerce hearing objecting to Trump's proposed cut to the EDA:

We can't afford to leave behind Americans in certain sections of the country like mine. I want to ask you about the

economic development administration. ... This dire need is exactly why over these 50 years, this EDA administration has been so helpful to us in recruiting jobs. To keep our people at home and prevent starvation. Mr. Secretary, I am very concerned about this proposal.

I have a few questions for Rep. Rogers:

- If the government has been subsidizing sections of Kentucky for 50 years, and they are still poor, doesn't it suggest that subsidies are not the answer?
- Would state and local governments in Kentucky, and the Kentucky people, let Kentuckians starve if federal subsidies were cut?
- Isn't Kentucky's [EDA funding](#) of about \$8 million a year too small to make a difference in Kentucky's [\\$197 billion](#) GDP, let alone the state's level of starvation?

President Trump set the stage for spending reforms by proposing perhaps the largest cuts to liberal, big-government programs since President Reagan. That provided congressional Republicans a great opportunity to push hard for cuts—an opportunity that they have completely blown.

My intern, John, looked at appropriations committee hearings, but a similar pro-spending tilt is evident with Republicans on the authorizing committees, such as the agriculture and transportation committees. Some members, such as those in the House Freedom Caucus, do push for spending cuts, but they are heavily outnumbered even in their own party.

Here are the hearings that John reviewed, with the date, names of cabinet secretaries, and the number of Republican members who made comments:

[Commerce](#), March 20, witness Wilbur Ross, 6 GOP members.

[Education](#), March 20, witness Betsy DeVos, 7 GOP members.

[Energy](#), March 15, witness Rick Perry, 7 GOP members.

[Health and Human Services](#), March 15, witness Alex Azar, 7 GOP members.

[Housing and Urban Development](#), March 20, witness Ben Carson, 6 GOP members.

[Labor](#), March 6, witness Alexander Acosta, 7 GOP members.

[Treasury](#), March 6, witness Steven Mnuchin, 7 GOP members.

I think we have interpreted the comments of the members fairly, but my apologies if we misinterpreted, or if we missed any members who expressed support for cuts.

In sum, on reviewing seven recent budget hearings, we did not find any supportive statements for any of President Trump's specific cuts by members of his own party. A number of Republicans made comments generally supportive of fiscal restraint, but that does not move the ball forward if we actually want to downsize particular programs.

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