

June 7, 2008

**CROSS COUNTRY****Principle Beats Pork in California**

By JOHN FUND

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*Sacramento, Calif.*

House Republicans clearly suffer from a form of split personality. Last month, Minority Leader John Boehner unveiled a series of reform proposals he dubbed "Change You Deserve." But a few days later, over half of his GOP caucus voted for a farm bill full of pork-barrel projects.

Pragmatic Republicans who voted for the farm bill defend themselves privately by claiming GOP voters send mixed signals, saying they want smaller government while also pressing for federal largesse. But is that still the case following the egregious spending excesses of the Bush years, and the victory of John McCain, an antipork candidate, in presidential primaries?



State Sen. Tom McClintock greets a supporter on Tuesday, June 3, 2008.

AP

This week, a GOP primary for an open House seat in California featured a major clash between pragmatic and principled conservatism. The clear winner in the Sacramento-area district was state Sen. Tom McClintock, a politician popular with grassroots voters for his principled campaign for governor in the 2003 recall election won by Arnold Schwarzenegger.


Mr. McClintock trounced former Congressman Doug Ose 54%-39%, winning all of the nine counties in the solidly GOP district. Mr. Ose spent nearly \$3 million of his own money slamming Mr. McClintock as an "obstructionist" who rejected retiring GOP incumbent John Doolittle's success in bringing home earmarked federal dollars. Voters were given a clear

contrast between Mr. Ose's "effectiveness" argument versus Mr. McClintock's pledge not to "fight for table scraps" from Washington. "Earmarks aren't only bankrupting our nation, they are corrupting our Congress," Mr. McClintock told voters. "An earmarked project winds up costing the community that gets it far more in taxes in the long run."

By mentioning Congressional corruption, Mr. McClintock was alluding to ethical problems that forced Rep. Doolittle's retirement this year. The FBI raided the congressman's home last year as part of a probe into allegations that his wife Julie received money from lobbyist-turned-felon Jack Abramoff in exchange for political favors for Abramoff's clients. Mr. Doolittle insists he and his wife will be cleared.

Mr. Doolittle had built a local political empire by excoriating liberals while bringing home federal bacon. He once told me that he marveled over how well Democrats and Republicans got along on the Appropriations Committee he sat on: "It's because we so often have the same priorities" – namely, spending other people's money.

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Over 70 local officials that Mr. Doolittle showered with money backed former Rep. Ose. During his House service from 1998 to 2004, Mr. Ose was scored by the National Taxpayers Union as voting more often for higher spending than the average House Republican. Placer County Supervisor Kirk Uhler told the Sacramento Bee that "Doug understands the federal government has the responsibility to solve problems."

Mr. McClintock agrees the government has a role, and says he has voted for road projects that were part of a statewide transportation network. But local projects, he notes, often confer private benefits that represent a waste of money as well as divert resources from needed maintenance on existing infrastructure.

"Government can help most by keeping taxes down and providing a climate for people to flourish in," he says. "Jefferson warned about the corrupting influence of pork-barrel spending and said those costs would be reduced if paid for close to home."

Mr. McClintock was unprepared for the attacks on him financed by Rep. Ose's personal wealth. Ose ads noted that he grew up locally, while Mr. McClintock was a carpetbagger who currently represents a state senate district 400 miles to the south. Then Mr. Ose blasted Mr. McClintock for accepting per diem living expenses, even though his main residence in Sacramento was within driving distance of the state Capitol.

But the geography argument fell flat when GOP activists lined up behind Mr. McClintock. They approved of his voting for only five state budgets during his 22 years in office. They also liked that he was the only state legislator to oppose a budget-busting contract for the powerful prison guards union. "They decided Tom wanted to fight for what he believed and Ose was a pork-obsessed insider," says Jon Fleishman of the news blog [FlashReport.org](http://FlashReport.org)<sup>1</sup>.

The GOP central committee in Placer County, the district's largest, voted 19-5 to endorse Mr. McClintock. National conservatives also pitched in. Former presidential candidate Fred Thompson did a fund raiser, and the free-market Club for Growth weighed in with ads attacking Mr. Ose's fiscal record.

The McClintock victory is just one race, but it clearly represented a fundamental clash between what Mr. McClintock calls "two very different visions" of government.

When it comes to federal spending, Republican grassroots voters may have given their Washington leaders a pass in previous years. That may be changing. They've nominated John McCain, who's pledged to veto all earmarks and called for repeal of the Medicare prescription drug entitlement. And this week in California, they've made their preference known for a candidate who campaigned explicitly on a no-pork federal diet.

**Mr. Fund is a columnist for [WSJ.com](http://WSJ.com)**<sup>2</sup>.

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