

# OSU chief defends school's earmarks

**By JIM MYERS**  
 World, Washington Bureau

**WASHINGTON** — The president of Oklahoma State University believes earmarked federal funding has not only helped to break a vicious cycle that favored the nation's elite universities, but allowed OSU to develop such products as body armor now being used by U.S. troops fighting the war in Iraq.

"We had no time to pursue a conventional grant process because our researchers had found a way to protect the limbs of our soldiers in Iraq and it was needed immediately," OSU President David Schmidly said in a four-page letter to U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., who is targeting congressional earmarks.

"With the funding we received, we

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## OSU:

Schmidly said OSU and similar schools are at a disadvantage compared to elite schools.

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developed and tested a prototype in a few months and within three months 3,000 to 4,000 units were deployed for use in Iraq."

Schmidly also points out the body armor, which is manufactured in Pauls Valley, has been selected to receive an outstanding research project award from the Department of Homeland Security.

Coburn did not respond to a request for a comment on the letter, which OSU released Tuesday.

Schmidly's spirited defense of congressional earmarks came in response to a July 27 letter from Coburn to OSU and more than 100 other universities across the nation.

As chairman of a subcommittee that focuses on financial management, Coburn asked university presidents to provide information on how much federal funding their schools had received since 2000 and other details on those programs such as standards and accomplishments.

He also wanted to know about the role lobbyists had played in obtaining the funding.

In his letter, which also came with about 20 more pages detailing the various projects such as food safety, bioterrorism defense and energy, Schmidly said he was providing information only on the funding since he became president in 2003.

An OSU spokesman said that response covered \$52 million in federal funds.

On Coburn's question on lobbying, Schmidly confirmed in a separate attachment that OSU has hired a firm to lobby on OSU's behalf.

"Our lobbyists in Washington help us identify opportunities for federal research funding both through competitive programs offered by agencies of the federal government and congressional earmarking," he stated.

Lobbyists, the OSU head said, also provide information on research opportunities with other universities and work with the state's congressional delegation and committees on key bills.

Schmidly also used his letter to Coburn to speak about the discrimination that schools such as OSU faced in competing for federal funds and the way congressional earmarking

of some of those funds helped address but not overcome disparities in research dollars.

"Five U.S. states get almost half of all funding, and Oklahoma is not one of those states," he said.

"There is even evidence that the gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' may be widening even further."

Schmidly cited rankings that showed between 1994 and 2004 the difference between the No. 1 school in total research and development funding and the 100th school more than doubled.

"Senator, I ask you, in this knowledge-driven competitive world, how is my university to fairly compete in such an environment?" he asked Coburn.

Concerning the "vicious cycle" that Schmidly also described as a "Catch-22" that favors elite universities, he said OSU and similar schools cannot compete with others for competitive grants because they do not have the resources to update research equipment and, therefore, cannot recruit highly qualified faculty to do the type of work that wins grants.

In addition to the body armor product, Schmidly said congressional earmarks have helped OSU find breakthroughs helpful to farmers and ranchers, begin the development of a national senior testing center in Ponca City and develop a transportation system that connects all of the OSU campuses. OSU, he said, had no reasonable chance of winning the federal funding through other means.

"Our congressional representatives believed that these projects were important enough to Oklahoma and the nation to receive specially earmarked federal funding, and we are happy to report that the results of each project have been impressive and are contributing greatly to the research missions of the federal agencies, to economic development in Oklahoma and to national or homeland security objectives," Schmidly wrote.

He also explained a program he instituted that requires each project to have a well-defined purpose.

Schmidly calls earmarks critical to OSU's future growth as a research university and expressed hope that Congress will continue to provide them.

His letter to Coburn is dated Sept. 13 but an OSU spokesman said it was not mailed until Friday.

A number of university presidents did not respond to the request for information, and Coburn has indicated he may use his subcommittee to look into possible management problems that kept them from responding.

**Jim Myers (202) 484-1424**  
 jim.myers@tulsaworld.com