Coalition seats are better padded
Mark Davis
***Australian Financial Review*, 28 February 2006, p9**

Liberal and Nationals electorates have received substantially larger slices of government largesse than non-coalition ones under several spending programs, according to new research.

The statistical analysis, by Australian National University researcher Andrew Leigh, found coalition electorates received significantly more funding during the 2001-04 electoral cycle under four government spending programs worth almost $1.3 billion.

Dr Leigh found the higher the level of grants to an electorate under the programs - which provided funds for roads, community organisations and economic development projects - the larger the swing to the coalition in that seat at the 2004 federal election.

The findings will add weight to arguments the government has indulged in pork-barrelling by allocating more generous funding to coalition electorates in its political heartland of regional Australia than to Labor Party or independent electorates.

The paper will be presented at a conference in Canberra this week to mark the 10th anniversary of the Howard government's election in 1996.

Dr Leigh looked at funding from early 2001 to mid-2005 under four programs: roads to recovery (funds for local council road projects); regional partnerships (business and development projects in regional areas); sustainable regions (assistance for regions facing economic, social or environmental change); and volunteer small equipment grants (small grants to community organisations for equipment).

The results showed all four programs were more generous to coalition electorates, especially those held by the Nationals.

But there was no apparent difference in funding between marginal and safe coalition seats.

The Courier-Mail

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Coalition seats get most of the cash

Steven Wardill
27feb06

COALITION electorates were given the lion's share of handouts from a range of Federal Government programs, according to an independent study.

Australian National University research found multimillion-dollar programs, such as Roads to Recovery, were all skewed towards Coalition seats.

Nationals electorates were the most strongly favoured, ANU economist Andrew Leigh found.

According to the research, Nationals electorates received on average $6.8 million more from Roads to Recovery than electorates held by non-government MPs.

Electorates held by the Nationals also gained an extra $15,000 on average from the Stronger Families and Communities program.

"Liberal Party seats also did better than non-government seats, receiving $2.7 million more under the Roads to Recovery program and $8000 more under the Stronger Families and Communities program," Dr Leigh said.

Coalition seats also received a higher number of grants. Dr Leigh said the grants were not targeted at marginal seats and seemed more a "reward" for core Coalition supporters.

"However, a consistent finding is that seats held by the junior party in the Coalition – the Nationals – received more dollars and more grants that those held by the Liberal Party," he said.

For every $1 million in Roads to Recovery funding, the Coalition increased its share of the vote between 0.06 and 0.37 per cent.

"These results suggest that discretionary funding programs deserve more analysis," Dr Leigh said.

Nationals state president and Federal MP Bruce Scott said Dr Leigh was "right off the planet" with his research.

"I suggest this fellow finds out how the formula works before he makes these kinds of reports," he said.

Mr Scott said all the money from Roads to Recovery went to local councils. Money was distributed using a formula developed by state governments based on road lengths in council areas and average incomes.

Labor yesterday also accused the Federal Government of porkbarrelling over a $1 billion school infrastructure program.

Figures obtained by Opposition education spokeswoman Jenny Macklin showed funding from Investing in Our Schools was pumped predominantly into Coalition electorates.

In Queensland, Nationals electorates received on average $1.2 million while Labor electorates received $576,660 from the program. However, Liberal electorates received less, an average of $453,646.

Education Minister Julie Bishop said the assessment process for awarding funding was independent.

"The Coalition simply holds more seats in Parliament than Labor and holds the vast majority of large rural and regional seats," she said.

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ABC Online

National Party electorates cash in on Govt grants. 26/02/2006. ABC News Online

[This is the print version of story http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200602/s1578536.htm]

Last Update: Sunday, February 26, 2006. 9:26am (AEDT)

National Party electorates cash in on Govt grants

New research shows National Party seats are the biggest winners from the Federal Government's targeted funding grants.

Dr Andrew Leigh from the Australian National University has analysed how several discretionary funding programs - like the 'Roads to Recovery' grants - were divided up between the electorates.

Dr Leigh says even if the size of the electorates is taken into account, the funding was distributed in favour of those seats held by the National Party.

National Party seats got a another $6.8 million under the 'Roads to Recovery' program, and Liberal seats got a another $2.7 million, so it certainly seems a very strong partisan skew to me," he said.

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Road grants 'skewed to coalition seats'

February 25, 2006 - 2:14PM

The federal government has skewed
discretionary funding towards coalition seats but not marginals, according to new research.

New research by Australian National University economist Dr Andrew Leigh found the multi-billion Roads to Recovery program, the Stronger Families and Communities program and the Regional Partnerships program favoured seats held by the coalition junior partner, The Nationals.

"The strongest partisan effects are found for National Party electorates," Dr Leigh said in a statement.

"Compared with non-government seats, and controlling for relevant demographic characteristics, seats held by The National Party received on average $6.8 million more under the Roads to Recovery program and $15,000 more under (the) Stronger Families and Communities program."

Under Roads to Recovery, commonwealth grants are paid to local councils with $2.5 billion to be spent from 2001 until 2009.

Stronger Families and Communities will see $490 million spent over five years designed to give children and families opportunities to build better futures.

Regional Partnerships has money given to regional communities to foster the development of self-reliant communities and regions.

"Liberal Party seats also did better than non-government seats, receiving $2.7 million more under the Roads to Recovery program and $8000 more under the Stronger Families and Communities program," Dr Leigh said.

"Surprisingly the grants did not appear to have been targeted at marginal seats, and seem to have been partly a reward for the coalition's core supporters.

Dr Leigh also found that for every extra $1 million in Roads to Recovery funding, the coalition increased its vote by between 0.06 and 0.37 per cent.

"Taking account the number of voters in each electorate, this suggests that every additional vote obtained through the Roads to Recovery program cost between $20,234 and $3,281."

The research also showed more grants were made to coalition seats - those held by The Nationals received an extra 5.2 Stronger Families and Communities grants and an additional 3.4 Regional Partnership grants.

Liberal Party electorates received 4.3 more Stronger Families and Communities grants and 1.7 from the Regional partnerships program.

Dr Leigh said targeted funding was a possible reason for the coalition's 2004 election victory.

A spokeswoman for Roads Minister Jim Lloyd said the government had not skewed its funding and grants made under Roads to Recovery were decided by the Commonwealth Grants Commission.

"There is no bias to Liberal seats or National seats," she said.

"It is just that the Liberals and the Nationals hold more seats and a greater land mass within those seats and many more council areas."

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Herald Sun

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Coalition seats better funded: study

25feb06

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"It is just that the Liberals and the Nationals hold more seats and a greater land mass within those seats and many more council areas."

The spokeswoman said an audit on the Roads to Recovery program was due to be handed down by the Australian Audit Office soon.

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THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

MEDIA RELEASE

SATURDAY 25 FEBRUARY 2006

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING BRINGS HOME THE BACON

Targeted Federal government funding programs have been strongly skewed towards Coalition seats, according to new research by ANU economist Dr Andrew Leigh.

Dr Leigh analysed the distribution of funding across electorates of several discretionary funding programs, including Roads to Recovery, a local grants component of Stronger Families and Communities, and the Regional Partnerships program.

"The strongest partisan effects are found for National Party electorates", Dr Leigh concluded. "Compared with non-government seats, and controlling for relevant demographic characteristics, seats held by the National Party received on average $6.8 million more under the Roads to Recovery program and $15,000 more under Stronger Families and Communities program.

"Liberal Party seats also did better than non-government seats, receiving $2.7 million more under the Roads to Recovery program, and $8000 more under the Stronger Families and Communities program.

"As well as receiving more money, the number of grants was also higher in Coalition seats. National Party electorates received an additional 5.2 Stronger Families and Communities grants, and an additional 3.4 Regional Partnerships grants. Liberal Party electorates received an additional 4.3 Stronger Families and Communities grants, and an additional 1.7 Regional Partnerships grants.

"Surprisingly, the grants did not appear to have been targeted at marginal seats, and seem to have been partly a reward for the Coalition's core supporters. However, a consistent finding is that seats held by the junior party in the Coalition – the National Party – received more dollars and more grants than those held by the Liberal Party.

Dr Leigh also analysed the effect of targeted funding on the swing towards the Coalition in the 2004 election.

"For every additional $1 million in Roads to Recovery funding, the Coalition increased its share of the vote by between 0.06 and 0.37 percentage points, depending on the specification. Taking account the number of voters in each electorate, this suggests that every additional vote obtained through the Roads to Recovery program cost between $20,234 and $3281.

"While there has been plenty of research on US pork-barrelling, few Australian researchers have looked at the issue. These results suggest that discretionary funding programs in Australia deserve more analysis. One possible reason that 92 percent of incumbents were re-elected in the 2004 Australian election is the use of targeted funding."

Dr Leigh is available for comment on 0431 706 600.
For a copy of the report: http://econrsss.anu.edu.au/~aleigh/.
The paper will be presented at the John Howard's Decade Conference at the National Museum of Australia on 3 March.

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