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'Slush Fund': Senator Slams State Dept. for \$500M Payment to Green Climate Fund

(CNSNews.com) – Sen. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) on Tuesday slammed the administration's handover of \$500 million to the U.N. Green Climate Fund, asking a State Department official how the "handout to foreign bureaucrats" could be justified at a time when there were "real problems" that need to be addressed at home.

Barrasso told Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources Heather Higginbottom he viewed the payment to the "new international climate change slush fund" – the first installment of a \$3 billion pledge – as both a misuse of taxpayer dollars and a violation of legislation that prohibits federal agencies from spending federal funds in advance or in excess of an appropriation.

"It appears to be latest example of the administration going around Congress because the American people don't really support what the president is doing with this initiative," he said.

Higginbottom, appearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, confirmed that an agreement for the \$500 million had been signed on Monday.

"We have reviewed our authorities and made a determination that we can make this payment to the Green Climate Fund," she said. "We do not believe we are in violation of the Anti-Deficiency Act, and clearly our lawyers and others have looked at our authorities and our abilities to do this."

"I firmly oppose what the president is doing here and this misuse, I believe, of taxpayer dollars, I think completely in violation of the law," Barrasso told her.

"The United States' national debt currently is \$19 trillion. We have struggling communities across this country in need of help," he said.

"There was a debate in Flint the other night and I just think it's hard to explain to taxpayers in struggling communities across our country – even places like Flint – that the president and this administration is willing to give \$500 million as a handout to foreign bureaucrats instead of addressing real problems here at home."

The GCF is designed to help developing countries curb greenhouse gas emissions and cope with challenges attributed to climate change, such as floods, drought and rising sea levels. President Obama in November 2014 pledged \$3 billion (<http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/terence-p-jeffrey/obama-we-are-going-contribute-3-billion-green-climate-fund>) [1] for the initiative, which aims to raise \$100 billion a year globally from public and private sources by 2020.

Barrasso noted that Congress has not authorized or appropriated any funding for the GCF, and that the most recent fiscal year appropriations bill also "specifically prohibited the transfer of funds to create new programs."

He asked Higginbottom how the administration was able to divert and reprogram funds to meet Obama's pledge.

"We reviewed the authorities and opportunities available to us to do that, and believe we are fully compliant with that," she said. "I'll be happy to follow up with you and your staff."

'Nothing is overfunded'

Barrasso asked what accounts had been overfunded to the extent that allowed the State Department to divert \$500 million away from them, to the GCF.

Higginbottom pointed out that the administration asked for funding for the GCF in both its FY 2016 and FY 2017 requests.

"As we do our budgeting process we didn't look around and say 'Where are excess funds we can put in this?' We built it into our budget request," she said.

"What exact accounts were then overfunded to be able to move the money out?" Barrasso pressed.

"Nothing is overfunded," Higginbottom replied. "We looked across the appropriations bills and made allocations based on what our budget was and what resources were provided to us."

The GCF currently has \$10.3 billion in pledges from more than 40 governments. Aside from Obama's \$3 billion pledge, the next biggest ones have come from Japan (\$1.5 bn), Britain(\$1.2 bn) and Germany (\$1.0 bn).

Last year, Republican lawmakers threatened to block funding for the fund unless the U.N. climate agreement reached in Paris last December was submitted to the Senate for ratification.

Barrasso and 36 other GOP senators warned (http://www.epw.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/f11df6c8-def5-47d3-b59b-1c8112b1b2d7/gop-climate-letter-11-19-15.pdf) [2] the president that they would block taxpayer funds for the GCF "until the forthcoming international climate agreement is submitted to the Senate for its constitutional advice and consent."

The administration maintains that the agreement reached in Paris does not require additional Senate advise and consent.

Nonetheless, when Congress passed a \$1.1 trillion spending bill days after the Paris deal was finalized, the package neither blocked nor included funding for the GCF.

Asked at the time whether the administration would as a result be able to repurpose funds for the GCF under the omnibus, White House press secretary Josh Earnest replied that, "based on what we have reviewed so far, there are no restrictions in our ability to make good on the president's promise to contribute to the Green Climate Fund."

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