



JIM C'S QUIZ OF THE WEEK

MONDAY - 05/12/08

← Citizens Against Government Waste

HOW DID POLITICAL TERM "*PORK BARREL*" ORIGINATE?

Dr. Paul M. Johnson: Appropriations of public funds for projects that do not serve the interests of any large portion of the country's citizenry but are nevertheless vigorously promoted by a small group of legislators because they will pump outside taxpayers' money and resources into the local districts these legislators represent.

Online Etymology: *Pork barrel* "state's financial resources" is 1909, on notion of food supply kept in a barrel (literal sense from 1801); the shortened form *pork* in this sense is attested from 1862.

- Slaves were sometimes given a barrel of salt pork as a reward, and had to compete to get their share of the handout.
- The amount of pork to be found in an American family's barrel was considered a reliable index of their prosperity.
- J. Fenimore Cooper (1845): "I hold a family to be in a desperate way, when the mother can see the bottom of the pork barrel."
- Later, the image of a pork barrel was applied to legislation aimed at benefiting a politician's own constituents (either figuratively or literally filling their "*pork barrels*").

Conventional Wisdom: Pork Barrel = Old Fashioned Patronage

Moment of Zen: Selfish political projects bring home the bacon