U.S. Taxpayers Paid for Efforts to Oust Netanyahu

During last year's parliamentary elections in Israel, many suspected President Barack Obama used taxpayer-funded U.S. government resources to influence the election against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Until now, all they could do was suspect. But now, they know for certain.

According to a Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations report, the U.S. State Department paid more than $350,000 in grants to OneVoice, officially for the purpose of backing Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. But, instead, the money was used to support the group's efforts to oust Netanyahu.

OneVoice used the money to partially fund building a voter database, train activists and hire a political consulting firm with ties to Obama's presidential campaigns. The subcommittee's investigation concluded the organization "complied with the terms of its grants," but within days after the grant period ended, all of the infrastructure and resources were used to support a political campaign to defeat the incumbent Israeli government.

"That use of government-funded resources for political purposes after the end of the grant period was permitted by the grant because the State Department failed to adequately guard against the risk that campaign resources could be re-purposed in that manner or place limitations on the post-grant use of resources," the subcommittee's report stated. "OneVoice deployed its social media platform, which more than doubled during the State Department grant period; used its database of voter contact information, including email addresses, which

OVI expanded during the grant period; and enlisted its network of trained activists, many of whom were recruited or trained under the federal grant."

All of this was done under State Department supervision, according to the report, and was "consistent with a strategic plan developed by OneVoice leadership and emailed to State Department officials during the grant period." The official who received the plan, however, told the subcommittee he never actually reviewed it.

"The State Department ignored warnings signs and funded a politically active group in a politically sensitive environment with inadequate safeguards," subcommittee chairman Sen. Rob Portman (R-Ohio) said. "It is completely unacceptable that U.S. taxpayer dollars were used to build a political campaign infrastructure that was deployed—immediately after the grant ended—against the leader of our closest ally in the Middle East. American resources should be used to help our allies in the region, not undermine them."

Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.), the subcommittee's ranking member, suggested the investigation found "no wrongdoing by the Administration." She said the report "should put to rest such allegations," although it "highlights deficiencies" in the State Department's policies that should be addressed.