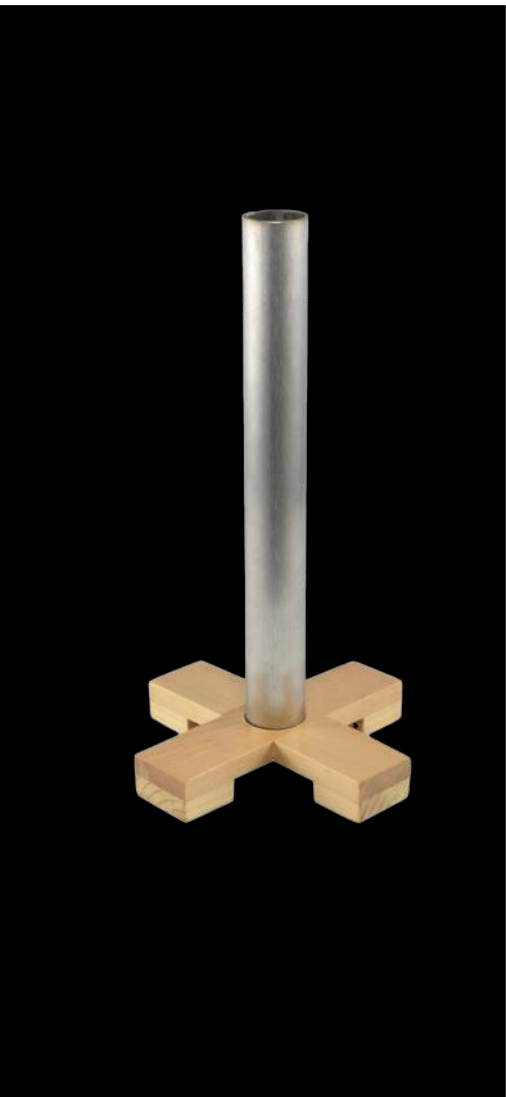




THE FESTIVUS REPORT 2020



To quote *The Lord of the Rings*, “It’s gone. It’s done... It’s over now.” A year that will live long in our memories (for mostly the wrong reasons), 2020, is drawing to a close. We’ve had 15-day lockdowns to stop COVID from spreading now stretching into nearly a year, wreaking havoc on Americans’ health, sanity, and economy, while also empowering petty tyrants across the country. Let’s just say 1968, the benchmark for a news-heavy and chaotic year, got serious competition from 2020.

While that was happening, Congress spent as never before, doing so ostensibly without a care. The Congressional Budget Office says the Fiscal Year 2020 deficit was an eye-watering \$3.1 trillion, with a “T.” Some of that is traceable to COVID-related spending, but a lot of it was not. For example, perhaps somebody can explain to me why the Kennedy Center needed \$25 million for salaries? Or why Congress reimbursed some agencies for money they had spent in late 2019 and early 2020, before COVID hit, on efforts unrelated to COVID? Maybe, just maybe, cutting agencies blank checks is why the debt skyrocketed from \$23 trillion to more than \$27 trillion. Spending was about 50% higher than last year, and payments of interest on the public debt remained extremely high at \$387 billion. If you laid out that many \$1 bills end to end, it’d be enough to wrap around the earth 1,506 times. And that’s money the government spends that doesn’t help anybody — doesn’t even buy a pen or a paper clip.

It is more important than ever for Congress to find its fiscal backbone. Our debt puts at risk the long-term solvency of major programs such as Social Security. And why? To pay for test tubes for COVID tests that turn out to be soda bottles? To see if hot tubbing a few times a week eases stress? Or is the risk worth it so we can literally lose drones over Afghanistan?!? You’ll find all that, and more, in this year’s edition of my Festivus Report, highlighting \$54,746,524,505.37 of totally wasted money. So, before we get to the Feats of Strength, it’s time for my Airing of (Spending) Grievances!

I got a lotta problems with federal spending, and now you’re gonna hear about it!

Keep track of Dr. Paul's efforts to expose government waste and reform federal spending at <https://www.paul.senate.gov>.

Dr. Paul's 2020 Airing of Spending Grievances

In this report, you will find . . .

- What does government waste mean for you?
- What could the government have paid for instead?
- The Waste of 2020
- Festivus 2020: The Top 10
- Spending Solutions: What's Dr. Paul been up to this year?
- Dr. Paul's Platinum Pig Awards for Wasteful Spending for...
 - Health Care
 - Foreign Aid
 - Environment, Energy, Science
 - Military
 - Miscellaneous



Keep track of Dr. Paul's efforts to expose government waste and reform federal spending at <https://www.paul.senate.gov>.

So, what does **\$54,746,524,505.37** mean to you?

If the waste I found is: \$54,746,524,505.37

And the average taxpayer pays about: \div \$10,006.55

Then Uncle Sam **WASTED** the taxes of: 5,471,368 people



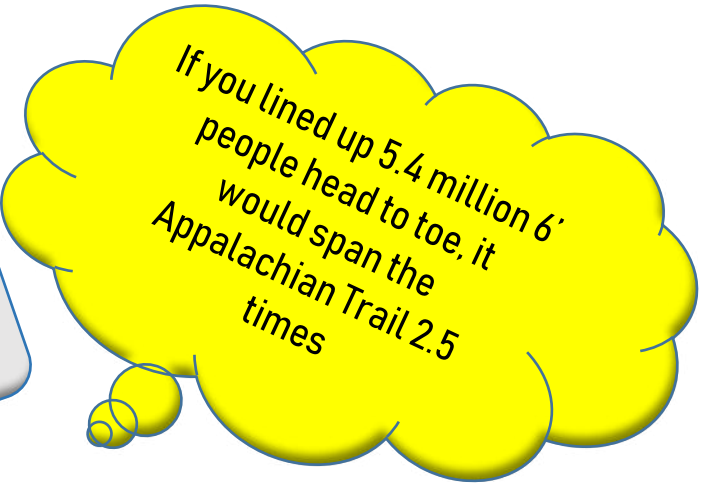
5.4 million people is enough to fill every Power Five conference football stadium... with more than 1 million people left over



If you spent all your time only counting to 54,746,524,505.37, one number per second, you would finish counting in the year 3756



\$54 billion is enough to buy every American a new 40" flat screen TV



If you lined up 5.4 million 6' people head to toe, it would span the Appalachian Trail 2.5 times

Keep track of Dr. Paul's efforts to expose government waste and reform federal spending at <https://www.paul.senate.gov>.

So, what else could **\$54,746,524,505.37** have bought us?



456,221 miles of paved two-lane roadway, enough to wrap the entire Earth eighteen times!



Three years of the entire Treasury Department



Six months of the Department of Housing and Urban Development

Do you think you could you have spent **\$54,746,524,505.37** better than the federal government?

The Waste of 2020

Health Care

- Studied if you'll eat ground-up bugs (NIH & NIFA) \$1,327,781.72
- Asks why stress makes hair turn grey (NIH) \$36,831,620.00
- Tries to get Eastern Mediterranean youth to stop smoking hookah (NIH) \$1,471,617.00
- Used cancer research money to create a “smart toilet” (NIH) \$6,973,057.00
- Tried to get adults to stop watching so much TV (NIH) \$1,246,507.00
- Gives cigarettes to adolescent kids (NIH) \$896,994.00
- Sent messages to moms to stop their teenage girls from indoor tanning (NIH) \$3,452,234.00
- Funded an allegedly faked study linking e-cigarettes to heart attacks (NIH) \$31,522,224.00
- Interviewed San Franciscans about their edible cannabis use (NIH) \$3,125,768.00
- Gave federal employees duplicative Medicare customer service access (RRB) \$217,000,000.00
- Tested if hot tubbing can lower stress (NIH) \$2,004,704.00
- Develops a master's degree in research ethics in Myanmar (NIH) \$968,932.00
- Helps justify the FDA's Deeming Rule (NIH) \$3,696,770.00
- Appropriated millions to the Urban Indian Health Programs (Congress) \$57,684,000.00
- Tries to help people get over their fears of going to the dentist (NIH) \$1,039,554.00
- Studied the prevalence of party drug use at NYC clubs and raves (NIH) \$1,454,217.00
- Waited for years on delinquent undelivered orders (VA) \$3,496,302,352.00
- Studied the effect of sleepiness on diet, physical activity, and obesity in kids (NIH) \$787,355.00

Foreign Aid

- Spent billions in Afghanistan on counternarcotics efforts \$8,620,000,000.00
- Funds classes for Kenyan artists and performers (State) \$150,000.00
- Planned Olympic-themed events in Singapore \$75,000.00
- Supports Sri Lankan think tanks \$800,000.00
- Spends millions to help deal with truant Filipino youth (USAID) \$37,500,000.00
- Teaches English to rural unemployed Romanians (State) \$25,000.00
- Put on theatrical plays in Mumbai (State) \$30,000.00
- Spends 5 years monitoring elections in Zimbabwe (USAID) \$10,000,000.00
- Seeks to start a venture capital fund for bad investments (USAID) \$2,000,000.00
- Helps disconnected Tunisian youth not feel like a problem (USAID) \$48,000,000.00
- Sends Russians to American community colleges for a “gap year” (State) \$3,250,000.00
- Sets up book clubs for Pakistani and Afghan kids (State) \$200,000.00
- Subsidizes Tunisian Chambers of Commerce (State) \$700,000.00

Environment, Energy, Science

- Walked lizards on a treadmill (NSF) \$1,557,083.00
- Funds the Boating Infrastructure Grant Program (FWS) \$13,545,889.40
- Bought public transit buses for localities (FTA) \$129,956,625.00
- Studied how people cooperate while playing e-sport video games (NSF) \$199,864.00
- Hired “interns” to do busy work (NPS) \$57,576.75
- Studied how New Yorkers abided by New York City COVID lockdowns (NSF) \$199,995.00
- Taught students in Washington about disputed climate science (NSF) \$487,528.00
- Subsidizes an insect ranching company’s R&D efforts (NSF) \$1,304,454.00
- Develops a wearable headset to track eating behavior (NSF) \$2,075,074.00
- Studies how food options change when a neighborhood is revitalized (NSF) \$260,000.00

Military

- Spent decades trying unsuccessfully to replace the Bradley (DOD) \$23,900,000,000.00
- Bungled building a drone base in Niger (USAFRICOM and USAF) \$110,000,000.00
- Built unsafe infrastructure in Afghanistan (Army Corps of Engineers) \$4,500,000.00
- Repurposed COVID response funds for unrelated acquisitions (DOD) \$1,000,000,000.00
- Lost equipment designated for Syrians fighting ISIS (DOD) \$715,800,000.00
- Spent millions on STARBASE (DOD) \$35,000,000.00
- Lost drones over Afghanistan (DOD) \$174,000,000.00
- Built a police complex lacking power that is not used (Army Corps of Engineers) \$3,100,000.00

Miscellaneous

- Rebuilt a taxiway for airplanes on Nantucket Island (FAA) \$19,999,869.00
- Bought COVID test tubes but received unusable soda bottles (FEMA) \$10,502,997.50
- Bought vehicles for State and local law enforcement agencies (USMS) \$53,900,000.00
- Built 3 bicycle storage facilities at D.C. Metro stations (Metro) \$5,966,180.00
- Prepared bugs for you to eat (NSF and DARPA) \$2,819,702.02
- Sprayed alcoholic rats with bobcat urine (NIH and VA) \$4,575,431.00
- Allowed States to take advantage of TANF rules (Congress) \$16,500,000,000.00
- Overspent on pre-fab housing and water pumps in Texas (FEMA) \$182,000,000.00

TAXPAYER DOLLARS WASTED: **\$54,746,524,505.37**

Festivus 2020: The Top 10

- ❖ Despite spending 15 years and billions of dollars, American counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan are ineffective (Foreign Aid)
- ❖ The Fish and Wildlife Service is subsidizing yachting (Environment, Energy, Science)
- ❖ NIH paid to find out if hot tubbing can lower stress (Health Care)
- ❖ Using CARES Act funds, the FAA renovated a taxiway at the airport on Nantucket Island most often used by private jets (Miscellaneous)
- ❖ NIH paid researchers to interview San Franciscans about how they use edible cannabis (Health Care)
- ❖ FEMA paid for test tubes for COVID tests but received contaminated mini soda bottles (Miscellaneous)
- ❖ NIH paid researchers to develop methods to stop grown adults from binge-watching television (Health Care)
- ❖ DOD lost more than 100 drones over Afghanistan (Military)
- ❖ USAID is open to creating a venture capital fund in Bosnia & Herzegovina for bad investments (Foreign Aid)
- ❖ NSF ran lizards on a treadmill (Environment, Energy, Science)

What is there to be done about all this waste? It's one thing to just point it out, but it's another thing entirely to try to stop it. Waste doesn't appear out of thin air despite it being, sadly, seemingly a mainstay of the budget. This year, despite the unprecedented disruption in all our lives, I've remained diligent in my attempts to stop waste, fraud, and abuse of Americans' taxpayer dollars. Here's how.

In early March, Congress spent nearly \$10 billion to refund agencies for money it had spent up until that point on efforts unrelated to COVID. I knew the right thing to do was to make Congress take unspent money from places such as the Inter-America Foundation, which funds things like clown college in Argentina and bird watching in Honduras, and repurpose those funds toward COVID rather than just spending more money. If there's a crisis, we need to make tough choices and take money from lower priorities, such as the IAF, not just pile more and more debt on us and our kids.

After the CARES Act passed, it was found the IRS sent many \$1,200 checks to the wrong people. Some estimates had the IRS sending about a million checks out to dead people, costing taxpayers \$1.4 billion. After I rased the issue, by writing S. 4104, the Stopping Improper Payments to Deceased People Act, which passed in the Senate, Congress decided to quit sending money to dead people... three years from now. Can't rush something like that, I guess (sarcasm intended). But that's not all. Not only was the IRS sending stimulus checks to dead people, but they were also sending them to foreigners, too! Once again, I took action, introducing S. 4878, the Stopping Improper Payments to Foreigners Act, which could potentially save, if implemented, on the order of millions of dollars.

Over the summer, the big spenders in Congress tried to strip the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) of its jurisdiction to do oversight. SIGAR is an excellent organization and the only entity specifically dedicated to ensuring the \$50 billion we spend in Afghanistan each year does not go to waste. They do yeoman's work in uncovering rampant waste, fraud, and abuse over there, which is maybe why the big spenders tried to give them the ol' heave-ho. But I led the charge, along with a couple likeminded senators with some good sense, to stop Congress from making such a big mistake. I am happy to report SIGAR can still do its crucial oversight work.

We didn't win every fight, but I am a happy warrior and will continue to sound the alarm on waste, fraud, and abuse of your taxpayer dollars. Like I said last year, Congress has every tool it needs to fight and end government waste. It's just a matter of finding the willpower to use them. Rest assured, I will keep fighting for fiscal sanity and providing my colleagues in Congress with the opportunity to find their fiscal backbone!

THE FESTIVUS REPORT

2020



Health Care



Wasting Americans' tax dollars, the federal government...

- Studied if you'll eat ground-up bugs (NIH & NIFA) \$1,327,781.72
- Asks why stress makes hair turn grey (NIH) \$36,831,620.00
- Tries to get Eastern Mediterranean youth to stop smoking hookah (NIH) \$1,471,617.00
- Used cancer research money to create a "smart toilet" (NIH) \$6,973,057.00
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- Studied the effect of sleepiness on diet, physical activity, and obesity in kids (NIH) \$787,355.00

TAXPAYER DOLLARS WASTED: \$3,867,785,236.72

WHEN YOU WISH UPON SOME WASTE

Researchers used federal funds from grants worth \$1,327,781.72 to see if you'll eat ground-up bugs



How appetizing does cricket powder sound? How about if it were cooked into a pumpkin spice muffin or a chocolate shake? Researchers at Colorado State University, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of Michigan¹ set out to answer those questions using federal grants totaling \$1,327,781.72 to do it.² The grants came from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).³

As part of a study entitled *Impact of Edible Cricket Consumption on Gut Microbiota in Healthy Adults, a Double-blind, Randomized Crossover Trial*, the researchers split 20 healthy adults into two groups. The first group was asked to eat a pumpkin spice muffin and chocolate shake, both with cricket powder, for breakfast for two weeks, while the second group ate regular muffins and shakes.⁴ They did not change any other aspect of their diets.⁵ After two weeks of that, both groups had a two-week cooling off period, a “washout period,” and then they switched places.⁶ The first group had normal

muffins and shakes for breakfast, while group two had the cricket-infused muffins and shakes.⁷ The goal of the research was to test the effects on gut microbiota composition while assessing safety and tolerability.”⁸

But why did the researchers think this research was necessary? The researchers believed “the current pressures on global food security, including climate change ... have ignited a search for more environmentally sustainable protein sources.”⁹ Got to find a protein substitute when the Green New Deal environmentalists kill all the farting cows!

Instead of testing Americans' appetite for cricket powder, the NIH and NIFA should have trusted the private sector, which has filled the market need created by those who opt not to eat animal protein, and done so much better than government could hope, if this study is any indication of what NIH's plan is. Two businesses have become staples for many trying to skip the animal while keeping the protein. One company, which produces a plant-based meat substitute, is worth about \$4.5 billion.¹⁰ Meanwhile, a competitor completed another round of funding this year, in which it raised \$500 million and received a valuation of \$2 billion.¹¹ Needless to say, it seems Americans have made their choice regarding what they'll eat for protein instead of beef, and it's not crickets.

But, as it so often does, the federal government ignored private-sector developments. Once the federally backed researchers were done feeding crickets to participants, they drew their blood, received stool samples, and asked participants to perform self-assessments in order to see how

the cricket powder affected gastrointestinal health.¹² Researchers determined that cricket consumption is safe and that it “does not dramatically shift the global gut microbiota after a 14-day dietary intervention.”¹³

But there’s more to people’s willingness to eat cricket powder than the taste. According to one study, only 4% of people currently eat insects for protein, and only 35% would even be willing to try them.¹⁴ Moreover, educating the market would be a herculean task, given that, per the same study, 72% of people don’t understand why somebody would even want to eat insects at all.¹⁵



Who could bring themselves to grind Jiminy Cricket into powder and bake him into muffins? Photo Credit: <https://rb.gy/kbupn5>.

The alleged question of the study, however, was not just the ability of participants to eat the crickets, but whether people would willingly do so. The only thing the participants needed to do to participate in the study, however, was “confirm willingness to eat one prepared breakfast per day (treatment or control) at home for a total of 28 days (two treatment periods of 14 days each), attend three clinic visits, and provide three blood and stool samples.”¹⁶ Not included in this deal was the agreement to eat cricket powder.

That’s right, the participants did not know when they were eating crickets. Therefore, the question of “will people knowingly eat cricket powder?” remains unanswered, despite that being a fundamental question underlying the worth of the study as a whole. If people can eat crickets, that doesn’t answer the question of whether they will choose to or not.

If only Jiminy Cricket decided to be these researchers’ conscience, and not just Pinocchio’s. He definitely could have convinced them not to waste Americans’ money this way.

STRESSING OUT OVER GOVERNMENT WASTE

Researchers spent funds from eight National Institutes of Health grants, totaling \$36,831,620.00 to study why stress makes hair turn grey



There’s an old legend about Marie Antoinette that the night before she was due to be guillotined, her hair turned from brown to white from the stress of her impending doom.¹⁷ Now scientists suggest the legend is extremely unlikely,¹⁸ but researchers at Harvard used funds from grants worth \$36,831,620¹⁹ to

test whether stress does in fact change hair color.²⁰

Despite “empirical and anecdotal evidence ... associat[ing] stress with accelerated hair greying,” this wasn’t sufficient for researchers at Harvard, MIT and, oddly enough, a couple Brazilian universities.²¹ The study itself found that when mice were put under stress conditions, there was a depletion of melanocyte cells (which produce melanin, the compound responsible for coloring of hair and skin), in turn causing the mice’s hair to turn grey.²² The stress caused their nerves to release norepinephrine, a similar substance to what is in Epi-Pens, which in turn caused the cells producing melanin to “migrat[e] and permanent[ly] deplet[e]” from the hair follicle.²³ In English? The stress causes the cells to stop producing melanin.²⁴

Now you might be asking yourself: who in their right mind at NIH would approve the use of \$32 million in grant funds to figure out why hair turns grey? A perfectly reasonable question. The truth of the matter is that NIH did not intend for the money from some of these grants the researchers used to go to hair-greying studies. **Some of the grants NIH issued were for worthwhile efforts, like studying skin cancer.**²⁵ **Others NIH issued to fund research on skin pigmentation diseases.**²⁶ And, in fact, there perhaps is a connection between skin cancer and grey hair. About 15 years ago, researchers at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute looked at this question. “It turns out that melanoma, the most dangerous type of skin cancer, involves melanocytes, the cells that help color hair and skin,” according to the Associated Press. “So researchers at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston,” the story reports,

“decided to investigate what happens when these cells become depleted, allowing hair to go grey.”²⁷

But the goal of the Dana-Farber team, which was also backed by NIH, was not to examine anything to do with grey hair. “What we really want is to come up with treatments for melanoma,” the senior researcher said.²⁸ Compare that sentiment with that of the 2020 research team, which **ultimately arrived at one conclusion: overall stress of the mouse directly influences the extent to which that mouse’s hair will grey.**²⁹

So how were researchers able to use this money for things for which NIH didn’t give them money? Sometimes researchers share funds, or sub-grant funds, to colleagues who are conducting similar or tangentially related research.

This is called downstream granting. Downstream granting leads to projects getting funded by tax dollars without adequate oversight by entities charged with overseeing the prudence and appropriateness of taxpayer-funded research. So, in cases like this, you can end up with private researchers using public funds allocated to cancer research on confirming that stress causes grey hair.

What’s more, these researchers probably didn’t spend \$32 million on this one study alone. I, and more importantly NIH, do not know exactly how much of the \$32 million in grant funding went to this specific study, as researchers are given broad discretion and “cross-pollinate” grant funds to fund studies all the time. This is one of the consequences of over-funding grant recipients. When money flows like water from a faucet, there’s no

responsibility from grantees to use it responsibly. Let's look more closely at one of the cancer research grants researchers used on this study.

NIH issued \$1.1 million to study the hypothesis that “therapeutic resistance of low-MITF [the Melanocyte Inducing Transcription Factor gene] melanomas can be mitigated by combining targeted or immune therapies with LSD [Lysine-Specific Demethylase, a protein, not the hallucinogenic drug] inhibition in early passage melanoma cell lines and PDX [Patient-Derived Xenograft].”³⁰ **The primary recipient of the \$1.1 million grant to study melanoma also happened to be a co-author of the study looking at whether stress causes hair to turn grey.**

Is it any coincidence that both of the studies involve melanocyte cells?

Researchers generally aren't motivated by making sure they're using Americans' tax dollars prudently. They're often more concerned with answering questions they think are interesting. Maybe the researcher had some excess dough laying around from his cancer research and thought helping to answer whether or not stress makes hair turn grey was a fascinating academic question. **But this is what happens when the federal government, not just NIH, shovels money out the door in such large sums!**

It is incumbent upon not only NIH, but also every other federal agency that makes grants, to maintain control of its funds, even if they're granted downstream. It just isn't good enough to issue grants for one purpose without making sure the money is actually spent on the thing for which it had been allocated!

BURNING TOBACCO (AND YOUR TAX DOLLARS)

The NIH is spending \$1,471,617.00 to get Eastern Mediterranean youth to stop smoking hookah



Smoking hookah, or shisha, has been a mainstay in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean for more than half a millennium.³¹ The practice originated in India and expanded into Pakistan, Iran, and ultimately the Middle East, where it took hold and became a cultural touchstone. But if the NIH has its way, those multi-century cultural roots are going to be torn out, root and stem, as **the NIH spends \$1,471,617 as part of an ongoing project to see if they can get people age 18 to 25 in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean to stop smoking hookah.**³²

Researchers at Florida International University (FIU) are collaborating with colleagues at the American University in Beirut and the University of Tunis to develop health-warning labels for hookah pipes to test their effectiveness in getting 18 to 25-year-old people living in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East to stop smoking from water pipes.³³ Researchers will spend at least the next



Hookah is a multi-century old practice in much of the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean. But now NIH is trying to up-end centuries of culture. Photo Credit: Adobe.

two years on this project and have been working on it since 2017.³⁴

Of course, the health effects of hookah are generally, undisputedly poor.³⁵ The American Heart Association has called hookah smoking among young adults “a new epidemic.”³⁶ But despite the poor health effects, hookah is a centuries-old cultural touchstone in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is not ideal by any stretch that it is growing in popularity both domestically and abroad,³⁷ but it is absolutely not the responsibility of American taxpayers to attempt to eliminate a traditional practice abroad – or assume some part of another country’s health care cost mitigation – regardless of the health effects.

It is also worthwhile to note that people in the Mediterranean, adverse effects of smoking hookah notwithstanding, benefit from diets that provide “significant cardiovascular benefits after using repeated measurements of diet,” a study reports.³⁸ Meanwhile, according to the American Lung Association, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), or lung disease, “is the third leading cause of death by disease in the United States.”³⁹ They add, “More than 16.4 million people have been diagnosed with COPD, but millions more may

have the disease without even knowing it.”⁴⁰ Though many a state and local government impose sin taxes to try to stop getting people to smoke tobacco, it seems to be to limited success. Perhaps it is civil society, then, not the government, that can most appropriately influence a person’s behavior.

The NIH should stop wasting Americans’ tax dollars funding this project and ask that the FIU team find other benefactors immediately.

FLUSHING YOUR TAX DOLLARS

University researchers used funds from a National Cancer Institute grant worth \$6,973,057.00 to create a “smart toilet” prototype



The Fourth Amendment protects people against unreasonable searches and seizures. The Framers of the Constitution knew that the American people value their privacy, a truism that may be even truer today than it was more than 200 years since the Constitution was crafted. If you’re one such American, and your privacy is important to you, wait until you get a whiff of this new idea out of Stanford University...

Researchers at Stanford University have used funds from a grant through the National Cancer Institute, an institute of the National Institutes of Health, worth \$6,973,057⁴¹ to create what they call a “smart toilet.”⁴² The purpose, as researchers put it, is to develop “easily deployable hardware and software for the long-term analysis of a user’s excreta through data collection and models of human health.”⁴³

What makes it smart? **The toilet operates with artificial intelligence, includes three cameras (including one video camera),** and features a urinalysis strip. The toilet’s AI collects the health data and then stores it in a digital cloud system.⁴⁴

So how does it work? Well, the user would sit on the toilet, and the hardware’s three cameras would use “biometric identifiers to securely associate the collected data with the user’s identity,” such as “fingerprinting and a distinctive method of using anal creases ... referred to here as analprint.”⁴⁵ **That’s right! The toilet would use fingerprint technology and a photo of the user’s nether regions to identify the user, and the toilet’s in-bowl video camera would track various metrics, including the time between sitting and first bowel movement, and other metrics relevant to bowel health.**⁴⁶

The toilet has three proposed uses: first, to track 10 biomarkers in urine; second, to measure voiding time, time to max flow, max flow rate, and voided volume; and third, to monitor defecation and stool classification, which can assist in analyzing overall bowel function.⁴⁷ **Ultimately, however, no matter how good the technology is at achieving its goal, nobody is going to use a toilet that**

has three cameras and takes a video of the user’s “analprint” to identify the user, never mind one that stores that data in a digital cloud that hackers could access.

Because that’s exactly what you want, right? A photo of you like that floating around in the cloud.

Researchers are planning to develop the necessary hardware and software to attach to the average everyday toilet, with an eye to facilitating in-home use.⁴⁸ Distressed by the lack of interaction with health care professionals, they highlight that “[u]nfortunately, in contrast to the aircraft industry, the fact that a normal adult in the United States visits a healthcare provider fewer than four times per year implies that surveillance of the human body is limited.”⁴⁹ **Researchers hope this will be another arrow in the quiver of telehealth medicine providers, but they are forgetting there’s a huge difference between video-chatting with your doctor so he or she can examine your tonsils and uploading your excrement into the cloud.**



Graphics from Stanford University researchers demonstrating how users were to use the toilet, where the pressure sensor and camera is, and part of what the video camera would record. Photo Credit: Park, Seung-Min, Daeyound D. Won, et. Al. Photo Credit: <https://rb.gy/byskdd>

What would possess the NIH to issue a grant for a toilet that takes such videos, you ask? Well, **the NIH issued the original grant under the premise that a non-invasive monitoring procedure called molecular imaging could be applied to**

early detection and management of cancer.⁵⁰ Leave it to the experts at Stanford to use cancer research money slated for developing non-invasive early detection procedures to develop perhaps one of the most invasive technologies imaginable. The NCI estimates there will be nearly 150,000 new cases of colon and rectal cancer in 2020, along with 53,200 deaths.⁵¹ There will also be 191,930 new cases of prostate cancer this year.⁵²

I'll leave it to the researchers to explain to those afflicted with these illnesses and their loved ones why they used NCI money intended to develop non-invasive early cancer screening processes to design a toilet that nobody will use anyway.

BINGE-WATCH THE NIH WASTE MORE OF YOUR MONEY

***The National Institutes of
Health's National Cancer
Institute is spending
\$1,246,507.00 to get adults to
stop watching so much television***



The coronavirus pandemic held millions of kids out of school. During the pandemic, “[M]ost children ages 6-12 [said] they [were] spending at least 50% more time in front of

screens daily,” Axios reported a study revealing.⁵³ “Parents,” they note, “were already struggling to limit screen time for kids when they were in school, let alone trying to pull them away from their devices while they are forced to stay home away from their friends, peers and regular activities.”⁵⁴

But paternalist regulation of screen time isn’t just for parents of children anymore, as **the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in the National Institutes of Health is spending three years and \$1,246,507 for an effort housed at Arizona State University (ASU) to get adults aged 23-64 to stop watching so much TV!**⁵⁵

The ASU researchers have developed an app that will act like an attentive parent to users. It will track users’ “sedentary screen time (SST; i.e. television viewing and/or video streaming outside of work and educational pursuits).”⁵⁶ You can set an allotted amount of weekly screen time and then your parent — excuse me, the app — will give you a notice via text message that 50% of the amount has been used up.⁵⁷ Even better, users can “earn” an extra 30 minutes of screen time if they spend 10 minutes doing “moderate-vigorous physical activity.”⁵⁸

Even though the NCI is projecting that it will support this project for three years, the researchers are only going to conduct one 16-week trial to see if the app is effective.⁵⁹ The ASU researchers have yet to publish any results of their efforts.⁶⁰

It goes without saying that cancer is a scourge on American society. According to NCI itself, “In 2020 an estimated 1,806,590 new cases of cancer will be diagnosed in the United States and 606,520 people will die from

the disease.”⁶¹ Americans spent \$147.3 billion on cancer care in 2017, and incidence of cancer is on the rise.⁶² The CDC says cancer is the second-leading cause of death in America, only surpassed by heart disease.⁶³



Americans binge-watch enough TV for NCI to deem a project aimed at getting adults to stop watching TV worthy of receiving cancer research money. Who knew we had a cure for cancer and could start using cancer research money for other things! Photo Credit: Adobe.

I can only imagine how infuriating it must be for cancer patients and their families, not to mention the loved ones of cancer patients who have passed away, to learn that the National Cancer Institute, “the federal government’s principal agency for cancer research and training,” is spending its money this way.⁶⁴

Now, one could possibly understand if this were a downstream grant of money, when the NCI gives money to a cancer researcher who then turns around and gives it to another researcher to do something else with it. But it wasn’t. **This was a direct grant from NCI, and researchers applying for the grant did not even pretend that their intent was to do cancer research!** The sole reference to cancer in the project summary, entitled “StandUPTV: Reducing Sedentary Screen Time in Adults,” was to link SST to an “increase[d] risk for cancer.”⁶⁵

Rest assured, problems such as these aren’t unsolvable. I have a bill, the BASIC Research Act, which would revolutionize the grant-making process. It requires each grant review panel to include a taxpayer advocate, to focus on the value the proposed research delivers to the taxpayer. Had a taxpayer advocate been on the grant review panel for this project, he or she might have asked if the federal government’s chief cancer research institute is really combating cancer with this study.

**SAY NO TO CIGARETTES, KIDS,
EXCEPT FROM UNCLE SAM**

***The National Institutes of Health
spent \$896,994.00 giving
cigarettes to adolescent kids***



They say the road to Hell is paved with good intentions, and it’s true. Sometimes one can start out with the best intentions but, by the time one arrives at one’s destination, they are doing something so obviously wrong that it’s clear to everybody but them. That’s probably what happened with the team of researchers from Brown University that used **\$896,994 from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to give cigarettes to adolescent kids to test their reactions to various levels of nicotine in the cigarettes.**⁶⁶

The researchers did two studies with NIH money. The first study compared “the effects of cigarettes varying in nicotine content ... on abstinence-induced craving and withdrawal, affect, perceptions of risk, product acceptability, and demand for usual-brand cigarettes in adolescent smokers across four laboratory sessions.”⁶⁷ The second study randomized adolescent daily smokers to receive either cigarettes with “very low nicotine content” or normal cigarettes for three weeks.⁶⁸ The participants were instructed to smoke only those cigarettes as assigned, to let researchers assess the total use of both study-compliant cigarettes and normal cigarettes, as well as look at cravings, withdrawals, the level of carbon monoxide in participants’ breath, social acceptability, risk perceptions, and post-use measures of nicotine and toxicant exposure.⁶⁹

The researchers justified the studies by saying they would help determine how cigarettes with lower nicotine content may affect real-world smoking behavior in adolescents.⁷⁰

Unfortunately, the timeline of the researchers’ work has rendered their studies antiquated before they were finished.

The Brown University researchers began working in 2014.⁷¹ At the time, they seemingly had good intentions. They ostensibly were trying to see if it would be possible to push the youth smoking market from regular cigarettes to low-nicotine cigarettes. **Since 2014, the market has moved, but not toward varying the nicotine content in regular cigarettes. Kids have started vaping.** Domestic e-cigarette sales have increased from \$1.5 billion in 2014 to \$3.6 billion in 2018.⁷² The global e-

cigarette market is similarly growing, having been valued at just more than \$14 billion in 2018 and projected to jump to nearly \$30 billion by 2022.⁷³

It’s not only the antiquation of the studies that is the problem, but the ethical issues too. No matter what their intention was, **manifestly, the Brown University researchers are using American taxpayer dollars to give cigarettes to children.** It does not matter that the researchers sought out juvenile smokers, enabling their addictive and unhealthy behaviors. We’ve known about the



Teenagers are choosing between traditional cigarettes and e-cigarettes, and opting for the latter. Meanwhile, NIH was funding studies that did not consider vaping as an alternative! Photo Credit: Adobe.

harm from cigarettes, and nicotine in particular, for ages. We know “nicotine is a dangerous and highly addictive chemical.”⁷⁴ We know it can cause arterial walls to harden, which can lead to a heart attack.⁷⁵ Not to mention, we know that smoking increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, and cancers.⁷⁶

Reasonable people can disagree as to whether it’s an improvement that kids are skewing toward e-cigarettes over traditional cigarettes. What’s not debatable is that while these researchers were doing their research, they weren’t paying attention to what was going on around them. Kids are vaping now, for better or worse, so studying whether they’d

accept different types of traditional cigarettes is an antiquated waste of time and money.

GYM, NO TANS, AND LAUNDRY

The National Institutes of Health is spending \$3,452,234.00 to test if social media messages will get moms to stop their adolescent daughters from using indoor tanning salons



If a mom of a teenaged daughter sees an ad on Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, Twitter, or YouTube saying, “Don’t let your daughter indoor tan,” will it convince the mom to not let her daughter patronize indoor tanning salons?

That’s the question researchers tried to answer, with the help of \$3,452,234 from the American taxpayer.⁷⁷

The research team had two specific aims. The first goal was to “develop and implement a social media campaign for mothers on health and wellness of adolescent daughters that includes a theory-based messaging advocating adolescent girls avoid IT [indoor tanning],” with the second goal to “evaluate the effectiveness of the IT messages at a) decreasing mothers’ permissiveness for daughters to indoor tan and daughters’ perceptions of their permissiveness, b)

reducing the prevalence of IT by mothers and daughters, and c) increasing the number of mothers who support strengthening bans on IT by minors.”⁷⁸

Researchers spent September 2016 through October 2018 recruiting subjects, and anticipated completing and publishing their studies by October 2019.⁷⁹ Ultimately, researchers published two articles. The first was entitled “Insights on HPV vaccination in the United States from mothers’ comments on Facebook posts in a randomized trial.”⁸⁰ In other words, not the purpose of the grant. The other paper was, mercifully, closer to the topic of the actual grant, but still a way off — it advocated the need for “primary prevention efforts ... throughout adulthood because the incidence of melanoma in middle to older age groups continues to climb.”⁸¹

These are not exactly results about whether moms can stop their daughters from indoor tanning. In fact, the second study just restated as a finding or conclusion the rationale for the grant in the first place.⁸²

This is not the first time the federal government has tried to create disincentives for Americans to indoor tan. As part of Obamacare, Democrats instituted a 10 percent tax on the practice.⁸³ CNN has reported that, according to the American Suntanning Association, **“the tax halved the number of salons in the country and contributed to the loss of nearly 100,000 jobs,” with the Association also saying that it “crippled an industry and hurt small business owners across the country.”⁸⁴**

According to opponents of the tax, it “led to a large increase in non-salon tanning in apartment complexes, home sunbeds, and ... places without professional operators trained to properly set exposure times to minimize the risk of sunburn.”⁸⁵ In fact, Snooki of Jersey Shore fame notably opined on the effects of the policy in 2010. “I don’t go tanning anymore,” the reality star said, “because Obama put a 10 percent tax on tanning.”⁸⁶



Snooki Polizzi blamed the Obamacare tan tax for why she stopped tanning. Photo Credit: Getty Images and NBCNews <https://bit.ly/2Zrr9m0>.

If imposing such a burden stopped Snooki, known for being tan, from tanning at the height of her celebrity, just imagine the disastrous impact it’s had on the industry from more casual indoor tanners. As observers know, it’s clear the tan tax not only has had disastrous effects, like those the American Suntanning Association has shown, but it is paternalistic as well. Is it the government’s job to stop people from indoor tanning? Absolutely not!

This is a trademark of government intervention: regulate an industry for people’s safety, drive them into less safe alternatives, then ask how to prevent them from going to those less safe alternatives. **This is an easily solved issue, and I have introduced a bill to solve it! S. 2713, the Tanning Tax Repeal Act of 2019, would repeal the 10 percent tax on indoor tanning.**

The NIH should remember that it is not government’s job to tell people like Snooki, or anybody else for that matter, not to tan. And as for the federal government telling parents how to parent? Nobody should want a piece of that Situation!

VAPORIZING YOUR TAX DOLLARS

Researchers used funds from NIH grants totaling \$31,522,244.00 on a study they allegedly faked to make it look like there was a connection between e-cigarettes and heart attacks



In the summer and fall of 2019, reports began popping up that a new fad among youth, vaping, was hospitalizing people.⁸⁷ According to *The New York Times*, reporting in August 2019, “[M]ore than 215 ... [patients] with mysterious and life-threatening vaping-related illnesses [were being treated] this summer.”⁸⁸ That same summer, the Journal of the American Heart Association (JAHA) published a bombshell article entitled *Electronic Cigarette Use and Myocardial Infarction Among Adults in the US Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health*.⁸⁹ **To produce it, researchers at the University of California, San Francisco**

used three grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), totaling \$31,522,244 to fund their work.⁹⁰ There's just one problem: according to peers, the researchers faked the study!⁹¹

Just a month after it was originally published, one researcher at the University of Louisville, Dr. Brad Rodu, caught the flaws and was able to determine that **a majority of the sample population (just 38 people) had heart attacks years before they started using e-cigarettes — and alleged the UC, San Francisco researchers conducting the original study faked results.**⁹² How was Dr. Rodu able to make this allegation? The UC-SF team accessed a public repository of information to populate their study, so he simply went back and looked at the original data.⁹³

Dr. Rodu, evidence in hand, galvanized prominent tobacco researchers from 16 prestigious institutions around the world, including NYU, Yale, Stanford, the University of Michigan, and the University of Chicago, as well as institutions in England, Canada, and Greece, to send a letter to the publishing journal demanding a review of the article for its veracity.⁹⁴

Particularly, the cadre of researchers requested JAHA retract its publication of the study given **“the analysis provided ... strongly suggests that the published findings are unreliable and that there is a case to answer.”**⁹⁵ According to research guidelines, retraction would be appropriate in the face of evidence of the sort that Dr. Rodu discovered — that is, “clear evidence that the findings are unreliable, either as a result of misconduct (e.g. data fabrication) or

falsification (e.g. image manipulation) or honest error (e.g. miscalculation or experimental error).”⁹⁶

Ultimately, JAHA conducted the review and retracted the study.⁹⁷

This is hardly the first case of researchers allegedly faking studies, and I promise it will not be the last. In fact, the NIH's Office of Research Integrity has a process for banning individuals for “research misconduct.”⁹⁸ According to ORI, “[R]esearch misconduct is defined as ‘fabrication, falsification or plagiarism in proposing, performing or reviewing research, or in reporting research results,’ excluding honest errors and differences of opinion.”⁹⁹

So do the UC, San Francisco professors fit this description?

It's actually impossible to figure out, at least for now. As part of the retraction process, JAHA requested the researchers “conduct their analysis based on when specific respondents said they started using e-cigarettes.”¹⁰⁰ Reasonable enough, right? Well, when faced with that request, the researchers said it “would require ongoing access to the PATH Wave 1 survey—a restricted-use dataset—and ... [they] have been unable to access that database.”¹⁰¹ In other words, the UC-SF researchers are effectively claiming they cannot back up their claims because their subscription to a database has expired.

Now, if I were a professional researcher accused of research misconduct, and all I had to do to clear my name was to access a dataset I had already accessed to prove my work, I would do anything I needed to do so I could refute the claims against my work.

But maybe that's just me.

GETTING HIGH ON THE GOVERNMENT'S SUPPLY

The National Institutes of Health spent \$3,125,768.00 to interview Baby Boomers in San Francisco about their edible cannabis use



Have you ever wondered how San Francisco-based Baby Boomers use edible cannabis (edibles)? Me neither. But now, thanks to the six grants the NIH issued to researchers with the Scientific Analysis Corporation over six years totaling \$3,125,768, we have the answer.¹⁰²

With the six grants, researchers published one (1) paper.¹⁰³ The paper, *Responsible and controlled use: older cannabis users and harm reduction*, sought “to elucidate how older adult cannabis users managed health, social, and legal risks in a context of normalized cannabis use.”¹⁰⁴ **That’s fancy research lingo for asking the question, “How are Bay Area Boomers getting high on edible marijuana without getting in trouble?”**

The researchers conducted a “qualitative study of Baby Boomer (born 1946-1964) cannabis users in the San Francisco Bay Area,” who they found and recruited in part by

“post[ing] recruitment advertisements on [C]raigslist.”¹⁰⁵ The study had two overarching goals. The first was to better understand the “health, social, and legal risks” of “normalized cannabis use,” as well as to investigate how users accounted for the time between ingestion and intoxication.¹⁰⁶ You’d think that with such lofty goals as those, results would focus on what medical steps may be necessary to mitigate the effects of over-consumption. **Instead, researchers simply reported what users were doing, which, it turns out, included “sleeping off the high, eating food, or drinking something like coffee or orange juice.”**¹⁰⁷ Maybe it makes sense that these plain non-medical steps were all that subjects reported given, according to the Centers for Disease Control, “[a] fatal overdose [of] marijuana is unlikely.”¹⁰⁸

Researchers also reported that interviewees said they avoided overdose “through experimentation or procuring labelled edibles.”¹⁰⁹ **As a 63-year old participant the researchers identify as “Steve” reported, “I buy the same thing every time. So I have the dosage down.... But when I didn’t, I ate a little bit too much. And it’s like, practically glued to a chair... . The thing with the edibles, now they’re labelling them more... But back when I started, they didn’t... I ate half a brownie. Which was too much... So I learned, don’t eat this much.”**¹¹⁰

What else did researchers find? Well, they found that Boomers used cannabis as a leisure activity and that it did not interfere with other aspects of their lives, which rendered the second question, regarding how users accounted for the time between ingestion and intoxication, irrelevant, given that they were

not eating the edibles while on the job. According to the researchers, the “informal rules” by which Boomers abided when eating edibles “are similar to the regulations, etiquette, and practices that have been identified in other studies of controlled cannabis users.”¹¹¹

So, we found out that Boomers stick to their limits, do not do edibles when they need to be alert, and drink coffee to combat a high that becomes too much. All this groundbreaking insight for a cool \$3 million.



Maybe instead of spending more than \$3 million to interview Baby Boomers about their use of edible marijuana, researchers could interview the two most famous stoners of that generation: Cheech and Chong. Photo Credit: <https://bit.ly/36v2P45>.

Regardless of one’s views of the value of medical marijuana or the use of recreational marijuana, **agreement should be widespread that spending six years and upwards of \$3 million to do a survey of how Baby Boomers in San Francisco get high on edibles is a colossal waste of time and money.**

ALL ABOARD FOR GOVERNMENT WASTE

The Railroad Retirement Board spent \$217,000,000.00 to give Railroad Retirement Board employees and beneficiaries specialized customer service



Imagine you’re at the DMV — we’ve all been there. You’re tired, you’re irritated and, and so is everyone else around you. You’ve been patiently waiting in line for three hours for your turn at the counter. Ultimately, you get fed up, leave to try again another day, and when you walk out the doors of the DMV, you look across the street and see a second DMV, but only for people who have worked for a little-known component of the state government. They issue the same licenses and permits and solve every problem that the normal DMV can, but only a special class of government employees can use the second location.

Well, if you’ve ever waited on the phone to get an answer or have a problem resolved by Medicare, that exact thing has happened to you, and you’ve paid for the fast lane you can’t access with your own tax dollars!

That's because the **Railroad Retirement Board (RRB)** has spent \$217 million over seven years to provide RRB employees and beneficiaries with specialized customer service for the 455,000 who can access the program!¹¹²

So how does this happen? Well, the RRB has the authority to administer a portion of Medicare, Medicare Part B, for “qualified railroad beneficiaries.”¹¹³ **“Railroad Medicare,” as the program is called, provides the exact same level of care as Medicare Part B.**¹¹⁴ RRB also has the authority to contract with a national contractor to conduct the Railroad Medicare program.¹¹⁵ Yes, the programs are identical. Despite offering the exact same quality of healthcare, monthly premium costs, and substantive customer service as traditional Medicare, RRB operates an entirely separate administrative program just for Railroad Medicare beneficiaries.¹¹⁶ How does RRB justify the \$217 million expenditure for a parallel program specifically for the 455,000 people enrolled in Railroad Medicare? **It claims the “higher level of customer service,” which just amounts to a shorter wait time in a telephone queue, is worth \$217,000,000 of your tax dollars.**¹¹⁷

To make matters worse, recently RRB has claimed that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is responsible for Medicare as a whole, including Railroad Medicare, while CMS claims Railroad Medicare is RRB's responsibility.¹¹⁸ Why does this matter? **RRB punting responsibility to CMS is a tacit admission that Railroad Medicare is substantively the same as Medicare Part B, and that RRB-specific**

concerns do not play into Railroad Medicare at all.

This problem becomes all the more acute when one considers that **Railroad Medicare has an improper payment rate of 12.5% and improperly paid out \$107 million from July 2016 to June 2017.**¹¹⁹

As the American taxpayer keeps cutting checks for Railroad Medicare, those improper payments keep going out, and RRB and CMS keep playing hot potato with responsibility for Railroad Medicare. But sadly, the American taxpayer is the only one getting burned.

WILL JACUZZI FOR MONEY

National Institutes of Health is spending \$2,004,704.00 to see if hot tubbing can lower stress



Did 2020 just drive you up a wall? Do you ever just want to check out for a few hours, sit in a hot tub, and let the world melt away? Well, if you're one of the 50 lucky participants in a study housed at the University of Oregon, you have that opportunity.¹²⁰

Not kidding! **The National Institutes of Health is spending \$2,004,704 to see if spending time in a hot tub three times a week for ten weeks relieves stress!**¹²¹

No... really. That's actually what they're doing.

Researchers are testing the hypothesis that “30 sessions of passive heat therapy using hot water immersion over 8-10 weeks will improve blood pressure in HTN [hypertension] individuals to a greater extent than exercise.”¹²² So, they're going to put some people in hot tubs, and others on exercise bikes, and see which group has lower stress at the end. Why are they testing this? **According to the researchers, “the vast majority of people are reticent to initiate exercise training and compliance in exercise regimens that meet minimum standards are extremely low.”¹²³ In other words? These researchers think Americans are lazy, very lazy.** So, researchers argue, if heat therapy works, we can send lazy Americans who don't feel like exercising to sit in hot tubs to solve their hypertension problem. What a wonderful use of Americans' tax dollars, right?



NIH is paying people to sit in hot tubs. No word yet on if it is also comping cocktails... Photo Credit: Adobe.

However, if sitting in a hot tub for hours on end was not enough incentive to make people participate in the study, **researchers are paying – that's right – paying participants \$600 to sit in a hot tub.**¹²⁴

Oh, to be a participant in this study... I just have one question — is it too late for me to sign up, too?

MISMANAGEMENT IN MYANMAR

The National Institutes of Health is spending \$968,932.00 to develop a master's degree in research ethics in Myanmar



After World War II, psychologists endeavored to figure out what could account for all the violence and atrocities committed against defenseless civilians. In the subsequent years and decades, psychologists such as Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo conducted controversial human experiments that shocked the world. Some regard the Milgram Obedience Experiment (1961) and Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment (1971) as catalyzing events that led to the implementation of better safeguards for human experiments.¹²⁵ These human subject research standards have become ubiquitous across the west.

Now, researchers at the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) are attempting to bring these standards to Myanmar by **spending \$968,932 and counting to develop**

a master's degree in research ethics hosted by a "University Medicine-1 institution" in Myanmar.¹²⁶

The two-year degree consists of a two-week program at UMB, a two-week program at the Myanmar university, likely University of Medicine 1 in Yangon,¹²⁷ and the balance of the 30-credit degree conducted online.¹²⁸

Ultimately, enrollees will graduate with a Master's of Science in Health Science with a concentration in research ethics.¹²⁹ This is but one of the several concentrations UMB's program provides. Others include Global Health Systems, a program designed to help participants "develop the knowledge and skills they need to operate in the global arena,"¹³⁰ an important set of skills for medical professionals in a country emerging from "decades of isolation."¹³¹

The researchers are also attempting to create a professional development program that will allow students to have an individualized mentorship experience with professionals in the U.S., Australia, and Myanmar.¹³² Their goal is also to provide students with opportunities to be teaching assistants (TAs) as part of their degree.¹³³ Do students in Myanmar want to be TAs? Do they even want a concentration in research ethics? It is unclear. The only evidence of demand researchers provided was the "demands of societies undergoing rapid transition."¹³⁴

Researchers justify this program by citing the "decades of isolation" from which Myanmar has recently emerged.¹³⁵ It is true that Myanmar has a history of isolation, but it is hardly North Korea. What's more, the emphasis on research ethics standards dates back to the 1940s and the human experiments

Nazi doctors conducted on unwilling participants.¹³⁶ Those experiments justified the Nuremberg Code of Ethics, the first set of research ethics standards for human experimentation.¹³⁷ Myanmar became increasingly isolated because of a military dictatorship that controlled the country, which did not come to power until 1962, nearly two decades after World War II ended.¹³⁸

Additionally, nearly a quarter century ago, Myanmar began allowing foreigners access, albeit for 28-day spurts.¹³⁹ But significant isolating factors remain, including limited access to the internet. **As of January 31, 2020, just 41% of Myanmar residents could access the internet.¹⁴⁰ This raises even more questions about the wisdom of paying for an *online* degree program in a country with limited internet access.**

Meanwhile, UMB's regular Masters of Health Science program costs \$710.70 per credit, in addition to approximately \$250 in fees per semester.¹⁴¹ This means that the 30-credit degree will cost roughly \$22,321. **The money the NIH spent could have funded full scholarships for 32 Americans seeking their Master's in Health Science** instead of propping up a largely unusable degree program in Myanmar.

Amazingly, this project will receive at least five years of funding.¹⁴² How NIH has not come to its senses over half a decade is mystifying, to say the least.

**DEEMING YOURSELF TO BE
CORRECT, EVEN BEFORE THE
RESEARCH IS IN**

***The National Institutes of Health
spent \$3,696,770.00 to study e-
cigarette TV advertising to help
justify the FDA's Deeming Rule***



In May 2016, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a final rule, the “deeming rule,” to grant FDA to have “authority to regulate the manufacture, distribution, and marketing of cigarettes, cigarette tobacco, roll-your-own tobacco, smokeless tobacco and other tobacco products that the agency, through regulation, deems to be subject to the law.”¹⁴³ FDA has famously used this rule to extend its authority over Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS), including e-cigarettes, vape pens, and the like.¹⁴⁴

But before FDA implemented its Deeming Rule, the NIH issued a multi-year grant (2015-2020) worth \$3,696,770¹⁴⁵ to researchers at Georgia State University so they can examine the “direct effects and the unintended consequences of televised e-cigarette advertising and provide timely scientific bases for FDA’s Deeming Rule

and any future potential regulatory actions on restricting marketing for Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS).”¹⁴⁶

The research is in its last year of funding, so they must have learned about all the direct effects and unintended consequences of TV advertising for e-cigarettes, right? Not to mention, provide a scientific basis for the FDA’s Deeming Rule? Not so much.

As it turns out, the only research the team has published is an analysis of how JUUL, was able to expand its sales so rapidly from 2011-2017.¹⁴⁷ To make matters crazier, the study did not even look at TV-based advertising. Instead, it looked at JUUL’s domestic retail sales in Nielsen-tracked stores, as well as its marketing and promotion on social media and YouTube, which, of course, is not TV-based advertising.¹⁴⁸ What was the big take-away from the research? **According to the team at Georgia State, JUUL used “innovative marketing across a variety of new media platforms” to achieve its success.¹⁴⁹ Surprise, surprise: when you look at how a company markets on social media, more likely than not, you will find that company marketed on social media.**

But researchers weren’t looking at e-cigarette marketing for their own personal interest, or that of the taxpayer, even. They had two interests: the effects and consequences of TV ads for e-cigarettes, and to “provide timely scientific bases for FDA’s Deeming Rule and any future potential regulatory actions” related to ENDS.¹⁵⁰

The Deeming Rule, for those who are unfamiliar with it, is a costly regulation. **Some have called the Deeming Rule “the most burdensome regulation to ever come down**

on any industry in American history.”¹⁵¹ The Deeming Rule, in brief, compels “e-cigarette manufacturers to file massive applications [with FDA] for every single product they sell. The cost of the regulation, according to FDA, is \$466,000 for each product application. ... **When all is said and done the Deeming Rule will wipe out most of the e-cigarette industry, leaving only a handful of companies standing.”¹⁵²**

Some have questioned the constitutionality of the Deeming Rule at all. In the summer of 2019, I held a hearing of the Federal Spending Oversight Subcommittee to examine the costs of federal regulation.¹⁵³ As part of that hearing, a witness, an attorney for a public interest law firm, argued that “rulemaking by mere agency employees [rather than Senate-appointed officials] violates both the original meaning of the Appointments Clause and the current Supreme Court precedent.”¹⁵⁴ As it turns out, the Deeming Rule was one such rule. According to litigants, “[T]he [D]eeming [R]ule was not just bad policy, it was also illegal: a career civil-service employee ... signed and issued that rule, even though she had no constitutional authority to do so.”¹⁵⁵

While the constitutionality, or not, of the Deeming Rule has yet to be authoritatively determined, I have been critical of the Deeming Rule and its disastrous effects from a policy perspective. In August, I wrote to the Acting Commissioner of Food and Drugs at the FDA to express my serious concerns that FDA’s implementation would effectively “ban ENDS product sales.”¹⁵⁶

What’s more, in promulgating the Deeming Rule, the FDA used the Tobacco

Control Act to “‘deem’ other ‘tobacco products’ ... to be subject to the Agency’s regulatory authority under Chapter IX of the [Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act].”¹⁵⁷ In other words, the FDA, of its own volition, claimed the legislative authority to regulate a class of products, rather than using a specific delegation by Congress to regulate these products (because no such delegation exists).

Equally troubling is the fact that the government has ostensibly paid private researchers to provide the basis for something the government wanted to do anyway, with or without scientific basis. It appears President Eisenhower was prophetic in his farewell address when he warned “a government contract becomes virtually a substitute for intellectual curiosity.”¹⁵⁸ These researchers did not set out to study anything that would not give them “timely scientific bases for FDA’s Deeming Rule and future potential regulatory actions.”¹⁵⁹ That is not science.

But, while there’s disagreement over the merit of the Deeming Rule, there can be no disagreement over the egregious waste of money the NIH authorized with this grant. FDA should have been able to prove the scientific merit of the Deeming Rule before it promulgated the rule. If it couldn’t, then the regulation was improper, and if it could, then this research was a waste of everybody’s time, energy, and, effort and most importantly, a waste of taxpayer dollars.

OF COURSE, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS GOING ABOUT IT THE WRONG WAY

Congress appropriated \$57,684,000.00 to the Office of Urban Indian Health Programs



You might have heard about the inefficiencies, and frankly, poor standards of care our veterans receive at Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facilities around the country. But the VA isn't the only agency failing to effectively provide health care services to one subset of Americans. Housed in the Department of Health and Human Services is a not-so-small Office of Urban Indian Health Programs (UIHP). The UIHP provides health care services to American Indians and Alaskan Natives (AI/AN) who have moved off tribal lands or outside areas covered by the Indian Health Service (IHS), of which UIHP is a part.¹⁶⁰ Seems normal, right?

Well, in theory, yes. But the way the UIHP is going about it is crazy!

In 1992, Congress declared it was the policy of the United States “in fulfillment of its special responsibilities and legal obligations to the American Indian people to assure the highest possible health status for Indians and

urban Indians and to provide all resources necessary to affect that policy.”¹⁶¹ Given the history of American Indians in the United States, this is an understandable and perhaps even laudable goal. And to comply with the stated policy, there needs to be a way to cover AI/AN who have moved away from reservations and other IHS-covered lands.

To fulfill the goal, however, **the UIHP subsidizes “41 urban-centered, nonprofit urban Indian organizations providing health care services at 59 [physical] locations throughout the United States.”**¹⁶² Services range from dental services to alcohol and drug abuse prevention to mental health services — anything you could need.¹⁶³ It's similar to the VA system, but whereas veterans are the only patients served by VA medical facilities, **only 43.8% of patients served at the 59 subsidized UIHP locations are AI/AN.**¹⁶⁴ So, what's exactly the problem with the UIHP?

Well, **Congress is forcing HHS to spend \$57,684,000**¹⁶⁵ **on 59 physical locations** (which are all Federally Qualified Health Centers)¹⁶⁶ eligible to receive Medicaid reimbursements from the general population. But Congress is spending the money specifically to provide AI/AN health care, and the locations are being visited predominantly by people who do not fit that description. **If the goal is to provide health care to all AI/AN, no matter where they live, it can and should be done more efficiently.**

In recent years, Congress has taken great strides in improving veterans' health care. In 2018, Congress passed the VA Mission Act, which “greatly improved veteran access to VA healthcare” as well as veterans' ability to go to

non-VHA facilities in their communities to receive health care.¹⁶⁷ Because the UIHP models the VHA in broad strokes by setting up physical locations and then letting its target population show up, we know how we can reform UIHP to make it better, as we did with the VHA!

If Congress is intent on maintaining its current policy choice, rather than setting up physical locations and letting AI/AN people show up, it should allow HHS to attach funds to AI/AN people, like it permits the VA to do with veterans, and let AI/AN people choose where to receive their subsidized health care. There's no reason to let the status quo continue when we have a roadmap to improve the situation.

DRILLING A CAVITY IN OUR NATIONAL DEBT

The National Institutes of Health is spending five years and \$1,039,544.00 to try to help people get over their fears of going to the dentist



Have you put off that trip to the dentist because you're scared? Bet you have canceled a dentist appointment — you didn't want a lecture on flossing, or you (and your check

book) were scared there was a cavity to be found? Most of us have been there. There's even a word for fear of the dentist: dentophobia!

Well, never fear, the federal government is here! **And it's spending your money to bankroll researchers at Temple University as they see whether telling you not to be scared of the dentist will get you over your fears so you keep your appointment.**¹⁶⁸

As unbelievable as it may seem, **researchers are two years into a five-year (yes, five full years) study** in which it will test if "a brief Internet-based cognitive behavioral intervention for the treatment of impairing dental anxiety among those seeking dental care" will actually alleviate anxiety about going to the dentist.¹⁶⁹

In other words, researchers are trying to answer the question, if you watch a video saying 'don't be scared of the dentist' an hour before your appointment, will it help you not be scared of the dentist?

Only thing is, the message is sent to you an hour before the appointment.¹⁷⁰ Many dentists require at least 24-hour notice for cancelations. So, one would



Fear of the dentist is a common fear among many Americans. But it doesn't have to be this way, according to NIH researchers! Photo Credit: Adobe.

assume most people have discussed whether to skip the chair, the bib, and the swish and spit much earlier.

Moreover, with our nation facing \$1 trillion deficits as far as the eye can see, the NIH perhaps should focus its efforts on helping to fix that financial cavity, and leave the ones in our mouths to our dentists.

DANCING, DRUGS, AND DEBT

The National Institutes of Health spent \$1,454,217.00 to study the prevalence of club drug use by NYC nightclub and electronic dance music festival attendees



What's a club drug? According to the American Addiction Centers, "Club drugs are a group of rave party drugs that are often used at nightclubs and large dance parties."¹⁷¹ Suffice it to say that it's a safe bet that if you tried to look at the prevalence of an eponymous drug at the place for which the group of drugs is named, you'd find a lot of it. It is a truism, sadly, that rave drugs tend to be found at raves.

But common sense wasn't good enough for researchers, apparently, as **they used a grant from the NIH worth \$1,454,217 to see how prevalent common club drugs like**

MDMA are at New York City-area nightclubs and electronic dance music festivals (otherwise known as raves).¹⁷²

The researchers went to NYC-area nightclubs and raves over a period of 24 months to ask 2,080 attendees about their own use of club drugs.¹⁷³ The purpose was to quantitatively analyze the level of drug use at these venues, which drugs were more popular than others, and the risks of unknowingly using drugs at the clubs.¹⁷⁴ **Anybody with a bit of common sense would deduce that people use certain eponymously named drugs – club drugs – at clubs in larger numbers than they do in everyday life. Similarly, given this is the case, the risk of an individual accidentally ingesting club drugs at a club is much higher than it is in everyday life.**

That's not the only thing this grant funded, though. This grant funded a slew of studies, including one looking at the popularity of the drink "lean" with EDM party attendees,¹⁷⁵ **whether or not partiers were more likely to post something to social media while high that they later regretted posting once they were sober,**¹⁷⁶ and even the extent to which "summer" is a risk factor for drug initiation.¹⁷⁷

While we have kind of made light of how silly this study is given it's already clear rave drugs are going to be at raves, that's simply to make a point. If these are dangerous and often uncontrolled substances, one would think this research would go toward preventing the spread of dangerous drugs and helping keep kids safe. Right?

Unfortunately, NO. The researchers conducting the studies did not express intent to use the information for drug interdiction.¹⁷⁸ Had the researchers aimed to collect the information with an eye toward limiting the use of these harmful drugs among NYC's youth, it would have been one thing. The researchers also didn't indicate to NIH that they wanted to improve the effectiveness of already-available interdiction efforts, or to better direct them to people who could benefit from them.¹⁷⁹ Instead, the researchers' sole aim was to find out what drugs are available, as well as when, and what people are doing while under their influence.¹⁸⁰



Researchers recognize that club drugs are prevalent in NYC, but are they trying to stop the use of the drugs? Nope! Photo Credit: Adobe.

So the question remains: what's the value to the American people of funding studies that show where illegal drugs can be found if the studies aren't trying to move the ball forward in terms of limiting the use of those drugs? As it stands, the NIH basically funds roadmaps for the uninitiated to find drugs they may have otherwise not been able to find.

THE VA IS STILL WAITING ON DELIVERY OF THINGS THEY ORDERED, YEARS LATER

Mismanagement by the Department of Veterans Affairs resulted in \$3,496,302,352.00 in delinquent undelivered orders



Let's say you visit a fast food joint for lunch. The person at the counter takes your order and charges your credit card. Then you wait. And wait. And wait. Your order simply never comes up. Eventually you would probably ask where your food is or demand your money back.

Well, if you're the Department of Veterans Affairs, you would just keep waiting. A review by the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs (OIG) found that the Department of Veterans Affairs ordered \$3,496,302,352 in goods and services that they never received, even years after the VA placed the orders!¹⁸¹ In the course of its review, the OIG found 10,624 delinquent undelivered orders (UDOs) to VA Medical Centers, or orders that were more than 90 days overdue.¹⁸² Ninety days overdue might not sound so bad, but the average amount of delinquency for the

10,624 orders was 732 days — or just over two years!¹⁸³

The OIG found 3,900 outdated UDOs totaling \$132.6 million in acquisitions the VA no longer needed.¹⁸⁴ To use our fast food analogy, it would be like pre-paying for a lunch you never got, not saying anything, and eventually going elsewhere. Only you didn't demand a refund first!

In one of the most egregious cases, “Excess funds totaling \$776,661 were not deobligated for five years despite multiple requests for action made by the contracting officer's representative to the Fiscal Service staff.”¹⁸⁵

Some may argue that “obligated” does not mean “spent.” The way a government contract works is that funds are committed to a project or procurement when a contract is signed. Checks get cut later, sometimes on delivery, sometimes in advance payments before delivery. However, government accounting rules treat these funds as spent when they are obligated, not when they are actually spent.

It is sort of like when a hotel puts a “hold” on your credit card in excess of the room charge, in case you get room service. You haven't spent the money, but your card company will count it against your credit limit until the hold is lifted. Even though you haven't made real charges to your card, you cannot go use that money for tourist expenses or cab fare.

That is essentially what happened with the VA. The money was not actually spent, but it was not available to spend elsewhere. This is why the OIG opined, “These funds

could have possibly been used for other goods and services to benefit veterans.”¹⁸⁶

That is a problem for an agency that is constantly strapped for cash. Even if there are unspent funds, they are tied up. Like anyone who's faced this after a hotel stay, you want that hold lifted as quickly as possible. But not at the VA; it was just easier to ask Congress for more money to obligate than it was to cancel contracts so they could spend the money they already have.

Years-long delays after initial requests for action were common. One order could have been deobligated in 2012, but the first request wasn't made until 2014, followed by a second request in 2016. The funds did not end up being deobligated until October 2017 — “over 3.5 years after the initial request.”¹⁸⁷ At least the “hold” eventually got released and went toward helping veterans, right? Unfortunately not. Government money expires. It is comparable to Congress closing agency credit cards each year and then issuing a new one with a new limit. So even if you get that “hold” lifted on the old card, that card has expired, and the account is closed. Thus, the money is lost, and taxpayers and veterans get nothing.

In fact, to prevent unnecessarily tying up funds, pre-existing VA policy requires periodic reviews of delinquent UDOs to identify orders no longer needed, or ones that the VA can reduce or amend to be cheaper.¹⁸⁸ As it turns out, VA employees did not “adequately monitor or reconcile open UDOs as required.”¹⁸⁹ It makes sense, then, that the OIG recommended the VA comply with its

own policies, improve monitoring protocols to ensure employees are compliant, and develop a monitoring process to check on employee progress in compliance with those policies.¹⁹⁰

While the OIG did excellent work in identifying the issues, their prescribed solutions are self-enforcing. Clearly, the VA employees dropped the ball once; what's to say they won't drop it again?

TIRED OF WASTE

The National Institutes of Health is spending \$787,355.00 on a flawed study intending to study the effect of sleepiness on diet, physical activity, and obesity in adolescents



When you're sleepy, you don't have enough energy to be as active as you otherwise would, right? You're more likely to reach for that unhealthy snack because, well, it's there, and why exert all that effort to make something healthier? Common knowledge, I'd say. But not to **the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which threw \$787,355¹⁹¹ at a study to be run by a researcher who needed additional coursework before conducting a study on the effects of sleepiness on diet, activity levels, and obesity among eighth**

graders.¹⁹² And to make matters worse, the money is supporting a study that simply does not appear to be designed to yield scientifically useful results about America's childhood obesity epidemic.

Let's pause. Say you're applying for a job in a law firm or at a doctor's office. You go to your interview and say "I want this job, but instead of giving this job to a licensed attorney or doctor who could start tomorrow, you should pay for me to go to school." Think that'd go over with your prospective employer? Somehow, with the bureaucrats at the NIH, it apparently went over well. **It must be how it works when the bureaucrats are spending your money, not theirs...** But the researcher does deserve ample credit for attempting to do something about childhood obesity. It's a real problem in America. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the obesity rate among Americans aged 12-19 is 20.6%.¹⁹³ That's high, and it should come down. **But there are serious flaws in the research design to the point that this study will not help actually move the ball forward.**

The study itself asks the question if declines in sleep time will, in eighth graders, be associated with higher fat mass, food intake, and less physical activity, along with more sedentary behavior (like watching TV).¹⁹⁴ How are they testing this hypothesis? Well the study tracked 100 healthy eighth graders, to establish a baseline, before following up with the subjects a year later.¹⁹⁵ That's just too few touchpoints to establish a real correlative relationship — the kind for which the study purports to test.

The data collection process also presents issues. **Participants were asked to wear a sleep tracker and a step counter for two weeks.¹⁹⁶ During that two-week period, the research team will ask the participants on just three occasions what they ate in the last 24 hours, which will then be used to estimate the middle schoolers' diets.¹⁹⁷** Then, the subjects will undergo fat mass estimations to discern bone density and bone mass.¹⁹⁸ It is from this extremely limited pool of information, from an extremely small sample size (which could be collected when the subjects act differently—if you eat a lot of junk food, would you do that while observed for a subject of a study of this sort?) that the researchers are attempting to draw broad conclusions about obesity, sleep, and exercise extrapolatable to general populations. These snapshots in time are insufficient.

If you think there are design flaws with this research, you're not alone. I wholeheartedly agree. But this is why the NIH typically entrusts grant funds to experts, rather than those who in their own words, require "expert training on the methodologies"¹⁹⁹ necessary to conduct scientific research of this sort. **Simply put, it is reasonable to ask whether NIH could have found a more qualified researcher to do the work, but the research itself hardly looks like it will help solve the very real problem of childhood obesity in the United States.**

If this is how we're looking to fight adolescent obesity, no wonder 1 in 5 Americans age 12-19 are obese.

THE FESTIVUS REPORT

2020



Foreign Aid



For years, I've been warning that foreign aid takes money from poor people at home to give to rich people abroad. And for years, so-called experts have assured me I was wrong as they praised foreign aid as an unequivocal good. But now, even the World Bank, an institution dedicated to providing foreign aid, has published research showing the so-called experts have been wrong all along.

In February, the World Bank published a paper, after a controversial series of events,ⁱ categorically proving “aid disbursements to highly aid-dependent countries coincide with sharp increases in bank deposits in offshore financial centers known for bank secrecy and private wealth management, but not in other financial centers.”ⁱⁱ **In other words? The World Bank says that when poor countries get foreign aid, deposits in offshore tax havens go up.**ⁱⁱⁱ

Skimming off the Top?

The research focused on the countries for which receipt of the World Bank's foreign aid is a greater portion of their annual GDP, otherwise known as aid-dependent countries.^{iv} These are exactly the sorts of countries which tend to have generally poorer standards of living — which foreign aid is purported to help improve — than countries that are not aid-dependent.

So what did researchers find? In the 22 countries receiving (between 1990 and 2010) an average annual disbursement in foreign aid from the World Bank exceeding 2 percent of their annualized GDP each year, **the implied average leakage rate into tax haven bank accounts was approximately 7.5 percent.**^v **When that threshold was raised to 3 percent of its GDP, researchers found the**

remaining 7 countries experienced a leakage rate of 15 percent.^{vi} The researchers “clearly underestimate the total leakage rate by only including funds flowing into foreign bank accounts ... (and not money spent on real estate, luxury goods etcetera),” they acknowledge.^{vii}

Researchers also did not look at other forms of less traceable skimming, such as potential cases of contractors receiving foreign aid to build infrastructure, schools, or other projects, and then doing the work on the cheap so as to pocket more profits at the end of the day.

But even with the underestimation, researchers found millions of dollars flowing to tax havens from all around the world. **Researchers found \$103 million in deposits in tax havens from Burundi alone, compared to there being just \$19 million in foreign non-haven deposits.**^{viii} It seems very unlikely all that money went to tax havens across the world, thousands of miles away from depositors, for the favorable interest rates.^{ix}

Who is Doing the Skimming?

Researchers looked at cross-border bank deposits in financial centers by residents of 200 countries — for example, seeing how many bank deposits in the Cayman Islands originated in Afghanistan, as well as looking at when those deposits happened in relation to when the World Bank disbursed aid into that country.

While the depositors are technically anonymous, you don't exactly need to be a rocket scientist to figure out what sort of people have access to bank accounts in offshore tax havens. Who, pray tell, has access

to offshore tax havens in developing countries? The researchers acknowledged their shortcomings, but noted **“it is almost certain that the beneficiaries of the money flowing to havens at the time of aid disbursements belong to economic elites,”**^x also known as **rich foreigners**. They arrive at the finding by noting “[r]ecent research ... documents that offshore bank accounts are overwhelmingly concentrated at the very top of the wealth distribution. By contrast, the poorest segments in developing countries often do not even have a domestic bank account ... and it is entirely implausible that they should control the money flows to [offshore] havens.”^{xi}

How Much Money is Being Skimmed?

So, what does this mean for the U.S. taxpayer? Well, first off, the United States is the largest shareholder of the World Bank^{xii} and gave it more than a billion dollars in FY20.^{xiii} It is also possible to extrapolate out the World Bank’s findings to American aid payments, as well, and the results are staggering.

In FY20, the Congress appropriated \$45,784,854,322 in foreign assistance worldwide.^{xiv} So far, the U.S. has either spent, obligated, or appropriated a grand total of \$4,842,223,543 to the 22 countries (Afghanistan, Armenia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Kyrgyz Republic, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia)^{xv} receiving more than 2 percent of their annual GDP in World Bank-funded foreign aid.^{xvi} But, recall, that of the 22 countries, seven of them (Burundi, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Uganda)^{xvii}

receive over 3 percent of their annual GDP in World Bank-funded foreign aid.^{xviii} So, if the respective 7.5 percent and 15 percent leakage rates for nations receiving foreign aid equal to more than 2 percent and more than 3 percent of their annual GDP holds, **Americans may have lined the offshore bank accounts of rich foreigners to the tune of \$517,108,341.70 in FY20 alone, not counting real estate, sports cars, Rolexes, and other luxury goods.**

That is more than half a billion dollars – more than \$261 million from just seven countries – of U.S. taxpayer money we can estimate potentially went in the pockets of already rich people in foreign countries.

Additionally, while researchers only looked at aid disbursements equaling 1 percent of countries’ GDP, it would be beyond belief to learn that the leakage rate went from 0 percent for smaller disbursements to 7.5 percent when the amount of aid surpassed 1 percent of a given country’s GDP.

When is the Skimming Happening?

Could it be that the aid is going into the economy for its intended purpose and eventually matriculating up to business owners, who then deposit it in more secure banks? It does not appear so.

If foreign aid was really helping everyday folks, researchers would have found a gradual increase in the number of bank accounts opened domestically and an increase in domestic bank deposits, all reflecting the increase in individual wealth as the economies receiving foreign aid grew generally and as standards of living increased. Such increases would also be at least correlated with disbursements of aid.

Researchers instead found a statistically significant “sharp and immediate increase in deposits” into offshore tax havens — made, in all likelihood, by “economic elites” — in the quarter in which the foreign aid was disbursed, “with no increases in subsequent quarters....”^{xix} Meanwhile, researchers found a decrease in the number of non-haven deposits in quarters of aid disbursement, followed by no significant increase in the number of non-haven deposits in the year following disbursements of aid.^{xx}

So What Does This All Mean to You?

Successful economies are not built on redistributive policy. They require private ownership, enforcement of contracts, and the rule of law, which includes anti-corruption.

What the World Bank research implies is that U.S. foreign aid policy is very likely substantially contributing to an increase in deposits of American taxpayer dollars in private offshore bank accounts — both as the leading contributor to the World Bank and as a purveyor of aid independently. It seems highly unlikely that U.S. foreign aid would be immune from the kind of leakage World Bank aid experiences.

If the average taxpayer pays roughly \$8,215 in taxes, then over 68,000 hard-working Americans worked all year to help further enrich foreign elites before a single person in need was helped.

And that is just what we estimate is lost to corruption. That does not take into account the various quixotic projects revealed in my

previous reports and again documented in this installment.

Economist William Easterly of New York University asked in 2006 how “the West already spent \$2.3 trillion on foreign aid over the last 5 decades” at the time “and still had not managed to get 12-cent medicines to children to prevent half of all malaria deaths” or “to get \$4 bed nets to poor families.”^{xxi} He also noted that “[p]reventing 5 million child deaths over the next 10 years would cost just \$3 for each new mother.”^{xxii}

So where does the billions upon billions of dollars we spend actually go?

Let’s take a look.

Wasting Americans' tax dollars, the federal government...

- Spent billions in Afghanistan on counternarcotics efforts \$8,620,000,000.00
- Funds classes for Kenyan artists and performers (State) \$150,000.00
- Planned Olympic-themed events in Singapore \$75,000.00
- Supports Sri Lankan think tanks \$800,000.00
- Spends millions to help deal with truant Filipino youth (USAID) \$37,500,000.00
- Teaches English to rural unemployed Romanians (State) \$25,000.00
- Put on theatrical plays in Mumbai (State) \$30,000.00
- Spends 5 years monitoring elections in Zimbabwe (USAID) \$10,000,000.00
- Seeks to start a venture capital fund for bad investments (USAID) \$2,000,000.00
- Helps disconnected Tunisian youth not feel like a problem (USAID) \$48,000,000.00
- Sends Russians to American community colleges for a “gap year” (State) \$3,250,000.00
- Sets up book clubs for Pakistani and Afghan kids (State) \$200,000.00
- Subsidizes Tunisian Chambers of Commerce (State) \$700,000.00

TAXPAYER DOLLARS WASTED: \$8,722,730,000.00

AFGHAN POPPIES: DIFFERENT DECADE, SAME STORY

The federal government spent \$8,620,000,000.00 from 2002-2017 on counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan, but it has made no headway in solving the problem



Afghanistan's opium production is a global problem. "According to the US military, 90% of the world's heroin is made from opium grown in Afghanistan," a 2019 BBC article reported.¹

Just how bad is it? In June 2018, The Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) published a scathing report outlining the many failings of the U.S. counternarcotics program in Afghanistan from 2002-2017. **SIGAR** reached the "inevitable conclusion" that, despite the federal government spending \$8.62 billion of your resources, "no counterdrug program undertaken by the United States, its coalition partners, or the Afghan government resulted in lasting reductions in poppy cultivation or opium production." It also pointed out that "without a stable security environment, there was little possibility of success" in the first place.² When he testified in front of

members of the U.S. House of Representatives in 2019, SIGAR head Special Inspector General John Sopko noted that "[w]ith or without a peace agreement, Afghanistan runs the risk of becoming a 'narco-state' and has already been described as such by former officials from the U.S. government and international organizations."³

Citing data from a joint report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Afghanistan's Ministry of Counter Narcotics, SIGAR wrote, "From 2002 to 2017, Afghan poppy cultivation soared and estimated opium production rose to historic levels, from approximately 3,400 metric tons in 2002 to roughly 9,000 metric tons in 2017."⁴

UNODC's annual report has revealed the number of hectares devoted to opium poppy cultivation has risen substantially the longer the United States has been in the country, with a relative lull from 2009 to 2011.⁵



Despite all the time, energy, and effort the U.S. has put into tamping down the opium trade in Afghanistan, it has had little tangible effect. Photo Credit: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/11/13/nato-couldnt-crush-afghanistans-opium-economy/>.

Specifically, they have shown the situation reached a high of 328,000 hectares devoted to opium poppy cultivation in 2017,⁶ or

810,505 acres. Though their 2018 report noted a decrease from the 2017 high, it said that “can be attributed to an [sic] heavy drought in the Northern region and parts of the Western region, and possibly to low and decreasing prices in regions less affected by the drought.”⁷

Even then, it stated the decreased total was “the second highest measurement since the beginning of systematic opium poppy monitoring and recording in 1994.”⁸

“From fiscal year (FY) 2002 through FY 2017,” SIGAR has found, “the U.S. government allocated approximately \$8.62 billion for counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan. This included more than \$7.28 billion for programs with a substantial counternarcotics focus and \$1.34 billion on programs that included a counternarcotics component.”⁹ The BBC report, meanwhile, broke down the amount of U.S. counternarcotics spending and estimated that, over the course of the war, we have spent \$1.5 million daily on counternarcotics efforts.¹⁰

That’s a whole lot of taxpayer resources for not much return.

The most recent, targeted federal approach to combating the proliferation of narcotics in Afghanistan was the *U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan*, an interagency policy developed in 2012 and headed up by the State Department.¹¹ The plan appears to have fallen out of use because the Trump administration has de-emphasized counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan in its *Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia*.¹² Yet, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs at the Department of

State has not stopped issuing grants related to counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan.¹³

Whatever one’s opinions on the War in Afghanistan, one thing is abundantly clear: counternarcotics efforts there have abysmally failed. As is so often the case with nation-building, having the best of intentions – and tremendous amounts of resources at your disposal – does not necessarily equal good results. Our soldiers accomplished their mission right at the beginning of this decades-spanning war. It is the Washington bureaucracy and establishment that failed them.

Mark this down as yet another in the long list of reasons why it is time to bring our men and women home.

SURREALISM, IMPRESSIONISM, AND GOVERNMENT WASTE

***The U.S. State Department is
spending up to \$150,000.00 to put
on art classes for Kenyan artists***



President John Adams is quoted as saying he had to “study politics and war” so that his sons could “have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy,” and, in so pursuing those and other areas, allow their children to study subjects including music, art, and poetry.¹⁴

Well, despite the Kenyan economy being worth only roughly \$110 billion, good for the 61st largest economy in the world,¹⁵ the State Department believes Kenyans are ready to study music, art, and poetry. **That must be why it's spending up to \$150,000 to train Kenyan artists!**¹⁶

The State Department's objective is to "identify upcoming artists and performers, train them in arts entrepreneurship and give them the tools they need to be able to succeed in the industry."¹⁷ While Kenya is, economically speaking, comparatively well off when compared to some of its neighbors (particularly Somalia and South Sudan), **it still has a per capita GDP of only \$3,691 per year.**¹⁸

According to the Kenyan Embassy, Kenya's largest economic sectors "are building and construction, infrastructure development, manufacturing, transport and services, and tourism ... [as well as] agriculture, and wholesale and retail."¹⁹

In a country where, the embassy also says, the "[a]gricultural sector is not only the driver of Kenya's economy but also the means of livelihood for the majority of Kenyan people," why is training artists the State Department's priority?²⁰ **Is the Kenyan economy really crying out for a viable art sector?**

If State really wants to improve the economy of Kenya, wouldn't it better serve the Kenyan people by helping to grow one of the main sectors contributing to economic growth in Kenya?

But the truth is that the State Department is not necessarily only looking to improve the Kenyan economy with this grant. It is also

seeking to turn its art students into **"leaders and agents of social change in their communities."**²¹

At this point one should ask, what makes a successful artist? Vincent van Gogh, for example, was not a leader in his community, and art was not even a viable profession for him at the time. Van Gogh "sold only one painting," and "[t]he money he had was supplied by his brother, Theo," The Van Gogh Gallery states.²² Yet he is now regarded as one of the greatest artists in history.

People respond to Van Gogh's works, like other art, for all manner of reasons. "I feel like the artist put something of himself into his work in a different way than most artist do," a curator of a Van Gogh exhibit said in 2016, as one example.²³

In 2017, several artists were asked, "What does it take to make a great piece of art?"²⁴ One artist observed in his response that "[a] piece of art needs to connect," adding, "It needs to have some element of truth to it that resonates with the viewer and leaves them something after they've left the piece."²⁵ **Another believed "it is important to create work that genuinely comes from within."**²⁶

Art is very personal, so these questions will continue to be debated. And there are certainly no "one-size-fits-all" answers. But the State Department, meanwhile, seems to have at least forgotten that compelling art is generally not produced for a particular social purpose.

No matter what the Embassy's goal is, to improve the economy or to make better artists, this program is doomed to failure. And with a per capita GDP of only roughly \$3,700, it's

hard to imagine the first thing on most Kenyans' to-do lists would be to buy enough art to make the art scene a “thing” in Kenya.

GOING FOR THE GOLD IN WASTE

U.S. Department of State planned to spend \$75,000.000 on Olympic-themed events in Singapore



The Olympics is one of the best opportunities for person-to-person public diplomacy. Every two years, people from all around the world gather at the Summer or Winter Olympic Games to experience the sports and culture and maybe even form bonds across international lines. This summer, things are a little different, as the coronavirus plaguing the world forced Japan to postpone the 2020 Summer Olympics it planned to host in Tokyo.

Before the tragic outbreak of the disease, though, the U.S. Embassy in Singapore had big plans to spend \$75,000 to put on a series of Olympic-themed events to promote positive views of the United States among Singaporeans.²⁷

On what exactly did the State Department want to spend Americans' tax dollars? Well, State suggested its grantee **put on “[w]atch parties for the Tokyo 2020 opening and/or closing ceremonies and/or event(s).”**²⁸ It

also suggested conducting “[a]n essay contest for students about sports-related mentors in their lives,”²⁹ and it looked to get Singaporeans on the move with “[p]rograms that create opportunities for the broader community to engage in physical fitness activities together with Americans.”³⁰

The State Department also wanted a grantee to put on “Olympics/sports-themed film screenings with accompanying talks about how sports promote diversity, tolerance, and inclusion.”³¹

What would have made Singapore a good venue to host this Olympic-themed diplomacy? Does the small country have a storied Olympic history in a particular sport, such as Jamaican sprinters do? Or perhaps it recently experienced a big Olympic success, such as Kosovo, which appeared at a Winter Olympics for the first time at PyeongChang 2018.³² Neither of these are the case when it comes to Singapore, which has been competing at the Olympics since 1948.³³ In all that time, it has won only five Olympic medals.³⁴

Sports-based diplomacy can be especially effective in thawing subpar relationships between countries and peoples. In 1971, a History Channel article recounts, while President Richard Nixon was attempting to open China to the western world, 15 American table tennis players “cross[ed] behind the ‘Bamboo Curtain’” and “spent 10-days traveling through Guangzhou, Beijing and Shanghai” taking part in “Ping-Pong Diplomacy.”³⁵ We still feel the effects decades later. After all, if it weren't for Forrest Gump

and other Ping Pong diplomats, would we have Yao Ming or TikTok?



If not for Forrest Gump's brave sports diplomacy in China, as shown in the unequivocally and unambiguously historically accurate movie Forrest Gump, the foundation of the American-Chinese relationship may not exist. Photo Credit: <https://bit.ly/2X7JcMy>.

Now, is the U.S.-Singapore relationship similar to the state of the U.S.-China relationship in 1971?

Not according to the State Department, which says, “For more than half a century, the United States and Singapore have forged an expansive and enduring relationship based on mutual economic interests, robust security and defense cooperation, and enduring people-to-people ties.”³⁶ It also describes the two countries as “closely linked.”³⁷ Moreover, **80 percent of Singaporeans have “a strongly positive view [emphasis in the original] of the regional impact of the United States,” according to the Brookings Institution.**³⁸

What’s more, the most recent World Bank data has the GDP per capita of Singapore as \$65,233.28.³⁹ Meanwhile, it also reports the GDP per capita of the United States as \$65,118.36.⁴⁰ So, Singapore is hardly a fledgling or developing country.

If the U.S.-Singapore relationship is already excellent, and Singapore is in fact richer than we are, why was the State Department planning to spend Americans’ tax dollars there?

“But they’re not actually spending the money,” you may say. Yes, the Embassy in Singapore has opted not to issue a grant for this project, but it’s not as if they came to their senses, recognized the grant’s inanity, and canceled the grant of their own accord. It took a pandemic for the Embassy not to pursue this idea, and there’s nothing to say that once we have beaten COVID-19, they won’t be back to waste Americans’ money.

“THINK” AGAIN BEFORE WASTING OUR MONEY, STATE DEPARTMENT

***The U.S. State Department is
spending up to \$800,000.00 to
fund Sri Lankan think tanks***



Assume you have \$800,000 to spend in a still industrializing country,⁴¹ say, Sri Lanka, in the time of coronavirus. How would you spend it? Would you build a hospital? Maybe you would purchase personal protective equipment for health care workers. Alternatively, maybe you would give the money to researchers who are attempting to develop a vaccine. **Well, if you were the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, you would instead opt**

to throw that money at Sri Lankan think tanks.⁴²

What is a think tank, you ask? Well, it is a hybrid research institution and public policy advocate. The goal of most think tanks is to develop public policy initiatives and work with lawmakers to implement them.

What would possess the State Department to undertake the project? It says think tanks' "role in the market place of ideas is critical, however, consultations in country revealed numerous operational challenges due to limited financial and human resources that have the potential to threaten long-term success."⁴³ **So, the State Department is implementing this program with two "key" goals: (1) "[f]oster regional and/or international connections with think tanks and/or other research institutes," and (2) "[s]trengthen institutional effectiveness and improve research quality and impact[.]"**⁴⁴

Is Sri Lanka in particular need of a cottage think tank industry? Is it at risk of being a failed state or experiencing economic collapse absent the public policy think tanks promote?

Sri Lanka, while not being a truly developed country, is far from a failed state. **Sri Lanka is "[a] development success story in many ways," according to the World Bank.**⁴⁵ Heritage Foundation experts indicate that while its economic health is "well below the regional and world averages," its "[e]conomic growth ... was strong" over the last several years.⁴⁶ They also report the country has an annual GDP of \$290.6 billion, a 3% annualized growth rate, and a per capita income of \$13,397, along with a 4.4% unemployment rate.⁴⁷

Yet Sri Lanka has experienced its share of serious issues. One report noted there have been "several political tugs-of-war between former president Maithripala Sirisena and former prime minister Ranil Wickramasinghe, after Sirisena sacked Wickramasinghe and swore-in Mahinda Rajapaksa, quite unconstitutionally," as well as "[j]ihadist-inspired bombings in April 2019 [that] created a security crisis on top of the deepening political crisis."⁴⁸ None of this is to say, however, that its governance is at a tipping point.

But the more fundamental concern with State's program than whether or not think tanks there are suited to respond to these and other problems is that **it is simply not the job of the American taxpayer to pay to support Sri Lankan think tanks.** There are no mitigating economic or political circumstances making funding Sri Lankan think tanks even justifiable, never mind a good idea geopolitically. Sri Lanka is not at risk of becoming a failed state absent think tanks' public policy ideas. The industry also does not employ a significant percentage of Sri Lankans. According to OnThinkTanks, a global database of think tanks, there are only seven in all of Sri Lanka.⁴⁹ Therefore, a collapse would not fundamentally impact the Sri Lankan economy.

With the advent of the internet, there is no monopoly on good public policy. While Sri Lanka has Sri Lanka-specific issues, there's no reason why its government can't use research produced by international think tanks or universities that address similar issues and tweak them for Sri Lanka.

Even in normal times, never mind a time when the U.S. and the world are combating a pandemic, using money this way is simply a slap in the face to every hard-working American taxpayer.

STAY IN SCHOOL ... FILIPINOS

U.S. Agency for International Development is spending \$37,500,000.00 to help deal with truant Filipino youth



What is truancy, and why is chronic truancy bad? Truancy is when students stay away from school without good reason. Truant students are well known to have adverse academic outcomes. According to the Brookings Institution, citing studies of Chicago Public Schools and Baltimore City Public Schools, truancy can be a stronger predictor for academic failure than failed courses.⁵⁰ But it shouldn't exactly surprise anyone that not going to school makes it hard to succeed in school!

So one might think that if the federal government chooses to help governments address truancy concerns, they would enter into agreements with local governments in the United States. One would be mistaken. Instead, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is devoting

\$37,500,000 to help the Government of the Philippines deal with truant Filipino youth.⁵¹

That's right! **USAID is using your tax dollars to assist the Filipino government as it tries to get the roughly 3 million Filipinos aged 15-24 who are not in school, are unemployed, or are underemployed either back into school⁵² or into the Filipino "Alternative Learning System," which the Philippines' Department of Education describes as "provid[ing] a practical option to the existing formal instruction."⁵³ The \$37,500,000 is going to help interdiction efforts for 60,000 youth.⁵⁴**

Meanwhile, in the United States, after decades of "stay in school" public service announcements, the U.S. Department of Education reports that "about 1 in 6 students," or 16 percent, were chronically absent (which they define as "miss[ing] at least 15 days of school in a year") during the 2015-16 academic year.⁵⁵ According to the Department of Education, "[a]bout 56.4 million students are projected to attend elementary, middle, and high schools across the United States."⁵⁶ If such a statistic carries through, it means that roughly 9,056,000 American students are chronically absent each year. **In total, American students were truant for a grand total of over 100 million school days during that 2015-2016 year, the Department of Education has said.⁵⁷** In high school, the problem is, as can be expected, particularly pronounced. The Department of Education states that over 20 percent — or approximately 1 in 5 — of the 15.3 million American high school students are chronically absent.⁵⁸

Amazingly, the federal government is spending Americans' tax dollars abroad to

solve a truancy issue when the truancy crisis at home is larger than where they are spending your money.

Let's take a step back. Why is truancy a problem? Everybody has missed a day of school here and there, so it's no big deal, right? In the same report quoted earlier, the Department of Education states, "Chronic absenteeism may prevent children from reaching early learning milestones," and it says that "[i]rregular attendance can be a better predictor of whether students will drop out before graduation than test scores."⁵⁹ Moreover, it says that dropping out of high school "has been linked to poor outcomes later in life, from poverty and diminished health to involvement in the criminal justice system."⁶⁰

"High school dropouts have been found to exhibit a history of negative behaviors, including high levels of absenteeism throughout their childhood, at higher rates than high school graduates," the Department's National Center on Education Statistics has said.⁶¹ "These differences in absentee rates were observed as early as kindergarten," they noted.⁶²

With 20 percent of American high school students (aged roughly 14-18) chronically absent, the Department of Education has called chronic absenteeism "[a] hidden educational crisis."⁶³ Yet, again, the federal government is choosing to spend American families' tax dollars helping Filipinos resolve a smaller problem.

How USAID spends Americans' tax dollars has once more failed to make the grade. Whoever was responsible for approving this grant was clearly truant from lessons on what makes for a bad grant.

GOVERNMENT WASTE: IT'S AS EASY AS A-B-C

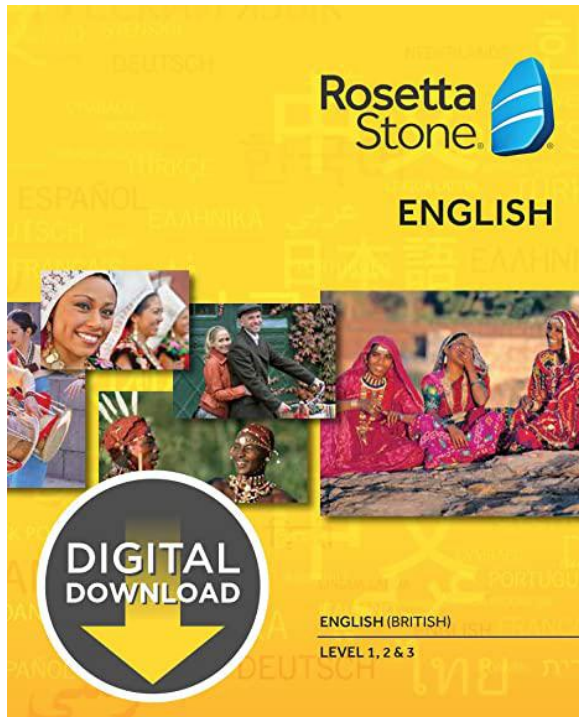
U.S. State Department is spending up to \$25,000.00 to teach English to rural unemployed Romanians



What makes for a competitive job candidate? Is it a good work ethic, diligence, or skills in the field one seeks to enter? Well, according to the State Department, it's the ability to speak English.⁶⁴ That is why it is choosing to spend up to \$25,000 to teach English to young and middle-aged rural Romanians who lack jobs.⁶⁵

Specifically, **the State Department is arguing that giving rural Romanians English language skills will "give them opportunities to expand their knowledge of democratic values and practices, in order to make them more competitive on the job market and improve their economic and social integration."**⁶⁶ The State Department will be requiring the recipient of the grant to conduct at least 100 hours of instruction per person, and it is teaching at least 25-30 people,⁶⁷ an infinitesimal percentage of the almost 20 million people living in Romania.⁶⁸

In layman's terms, the State Department is arguing there is a causal relationship between a



If the State Department really wants to teach 25-30 rural Romanians English, perhaps they should have shelled out for ESL software. At least that way, it would have wasted fewer of Americans' hard-earned tax dollars. Photo Credit: Amazon, <https://amzn.to/2Vb5Rq6>.

person having English language skills and possessing democratic values, which in turn leads to that person being a competitive candidate in the job market.⁶⁹

This argument has some significant flaws. For one, it operates under an assumption that having English language skills translates to knowledge of democratic practices and values.

While most of the English-speaking world does have what Americans might recognize as democratic governance, it is hard to justify that English language skills are responsible. For example, dictators often speak at least some English, including former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein⁷⁰ and former Libyan dictator Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.⁷¹

Though the Trucial States finalized their independence from Britain in 1971 and became the United Arab Emirates,⁷² the UAE retains

many calling cards of this association, including the English language, which next to Arabic is the most common language spoken in the UAE, according to the Central Intelligence Agency.⁷³

However, one cannot mistake the UAE for a place where democratic values flourish, despite the bevy of English speakers — yet its economy is generally solid. In January 2020, the watchdog Human Rights Watch reported that “United Arab Emirates authorities displayed a dangerous disregard for the rule of law in 2019 with arbitrary detentions, seriously flawed trials, and rampant abuse of detainees,” which included cases of “arbitrary and incommunicado detention, torture and ill-treatment, prolonged solitary confinement, and denial of access to legal assistance.”⁷⁴ Despite all these grievously undemocratic practices, the UAE has a lower unemployment rate than the United States, clocking in at just 2.6 percent unemployment.⁷⁵

Perhaps possession of democratic values or English has a correlative, not causal, relationship with being hireable.

Moreover, if the State Department’s goal is to provide rural Romanians with English skills to instill knowledge of democratic values and practices “*in order to make them more competitive on the job market* [emphasis added],”⁷⁶ **then State needs to clearly tell Americans how having knowledge of democratic values and practices makes a job candidate more competitive in Romania.**

Because maybe — just maybe — having English language skills is not helpful in the Romanian job market. As it turns out, English is not a language most people commonly speak in Romania. According to the Central

Intelligence Agency, the three most common languages are Romanian (85.4%), Hungarian (6.3%), and Romani (1.2%).⁷⁷

This is not to say, however, that few Romanians have any training in English, as Eurostat reports it is widely taught in Romanian schools.⁷⁸

When it comes to our own country, the most recent American Community Survey run by the U.S. Census Bureau determined that 8.5 percent of Americans speak English “less than very well.”⁷⁹

If the federal government is intent on teaching people English so they can expand their knowledge of democratic values and make themselves more competitive job candidates, perhaps it should first look toward this issue and other needs here, where English is a de facto requirement of most any job.

ENTER STAGE RIGHT: GOVERNMENT WASTE

***The U.S. Department of State's
Consulate in Mumbai spent up to
\$30,000.00 to inspire social good
through theater***



Theater can have a profound effect on society by holding up a mirror to it. *The*

Crucible, for example, a story told about the Salem witch trials, is an allegory for McCarthyism.⁸⁰ Seminal works of theater have become cultural touchstones that have had lasting impact beyond their performances. It is clear, though, that the State Department spending \$30,000 to put on six performances of a play in Mumbai addressing a social issue will not move the needle.⁸¹



Albert and Alberta Gator surveying The Swamp one last time before they jet off to India to create a play, courtesy of the U.S. taxpayer. Photo Credit: University of Florida, <https://rb.gy/06e5kz>.

The State Department issued the grant to the University of Florida.⁸² The plan went as follows: the University of Florida (UF) was to pay to fly an American playwright out to Mumbai to mentor a local theater troupe or acting studio as they created an original play addressing a social issue of their choice.⁸³ The playwright was to spend 4-6 weeks in Mumbai, overseeing script development and witnessing the play's debut.⁸⁴ The playwright was also required to put on at least four “masterclasses,” as if India doesn't have playwrights of its own.⁸⁵

Why would the State Department issue the grant to a university, instead of a theater troupe or theater-based non-governmental organization? **It turns out the State Department received just two applications,**

and the application from the University of Florida was the only one that met the Department's parameters.⁸⁶

So what actually happened in Mumbai? UF personnel selected a playwright from “the Mumbai-based Five Senses Theatre,” according to the State Department.⁸⁷ The UF team flew to meet with its selected partner organization, the G5A Foundation for Contemporary Culture, and together they created a play entitled “Even Mists Have Silver Linings.”⁸⁸



A still from "Even Mists Have Silver Linings." American taxpayers paid up to \$7,500 per performance. Photo Credit: U.S. Consulate Mumbai, <https://rb.gy/kfb6ed>.

What makes theater impactful is not only the topic, but how many people are able to see the performances. *The Crucible*, for example, has been performed innumerable times, from its extended run on Broadway to high schools

and everywhere in between. Theaters have brought it back for encore runs years after it initially debuted. Meanwhile, University of Florida personnel arrived in Mumbai on January 30, 2020, and returned in mid-March.⁸⁹ Before the interference of coronavirus in March, the **team planned just six performances of the play, from March 7-14, in a black box theater.**⁹⁰ Ultimately, the **team cut the production's run short after four of the six performances**, when the state government closed all theaters and banned public gatherings in response to the novel coronavirus.⁹¹

So, it looks like the American taxpayer paid \$7,500 per performance of “Even Mists Have Silver Linings.”

It is also important to note that black box theaters tend to be significantly smaller than Broadway-style theaters. **Mumbai is a city of more than 20 million people.**⁹² **Even if the play was a masterpiece, how many Mumbai residents were able to crowd into that black box theater to see it?** India as a whole has a population of just shy of 1.4 billion.⁹³ Even if the State Department-funded play is performed 10 times, or 20, how much will those performances move the needle? **If the goal is to move the needle of Indian culture on certain social issues by performing a play, people actually need to see the play.**

One must also feel sympathetic to American theater troupes and acting studios as they work to raise money to put on performances domestically. What would the State Department say to their members as it uses their tax dollars on productions overseas?

MONITORING WASTE

U.S. Agency for International Development is spending \$10,000,000.00 and 5 years to attempt to improve Zimbabwe's political process



One of the safest bets in the world is that Emmerson Mnangagwa will be reelected President of Zimbabwe — he'll make sure of it. **Yet Uncle Sam wants to spend American taxpayer dollars to determine if the upcoming elections there are, in fact, rigged.**⁹⁴ So the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is paying \$10 million in an effort to improve Zimbabwe's political process, including supporting non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in acting as election monitors for the 2023 Zimbabwean election.⁹⁵

Since gaining independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has been the posterchild of a “highly corrupt” country, and it is rated the 40th most corrupt country in the world, according to Transparency International.⁹⁶ Zimbabwe has likely not known a fair democratic election in more than 30 years.

For nearly 40 years after Zimbabwe became independent, Robert Mugabe was in charge.⁹⁷ Whenever his inevitable reelections

were threatened, he used the power of the state to violently suppress his opponents in defiance of the international community, which condemned his behavior repeatedly.⁹⁸

In 2017, Emmerson Mnangagwa came to power promising to be a reformer, despite having gained power through a military-sponsored coup.⁹⁹

Maybe he's true to his word, and the U.S. paying non-governmental organizations to monitor the 2023 Zimbabwean election will help instill democratic confidence in the people of Zimbabwe. But the evidence suggests otherwise.

After seizing power in 2017, Mnangagwa held elections in 2018. International watchdogs, including from the European Union, observed the 2018 election and found substantial “irregularities,” according to *The Washington Post*.¹⁰⁰

Watchdogs alleged Mnangagwa's party withheld food and agricultural supplies in exchange for political support, doctored vote totals, and engaged in voter intimidation, among other tactics.^{101,102} The 2018 election was “seriously marred” by “state sponsored political violence,” USAID admits.¹⁰³ USAID also called the 2018 election



Police carry a Zimbabwean protester from the protest area in August 2019. Protesters took to the streets to protest Mnangagwa rule. Photo Credit: Aaron Ufumeli/EPA, <https://rb.gy/1sactw>.

“less-than-fair,” resulting from a myriad of flaws including but not limited to “intimidation of voters ... the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) failures to be inclusive and transparent leading to accusations that the Commission was politically biased, and biased media.”¹⁰⁴

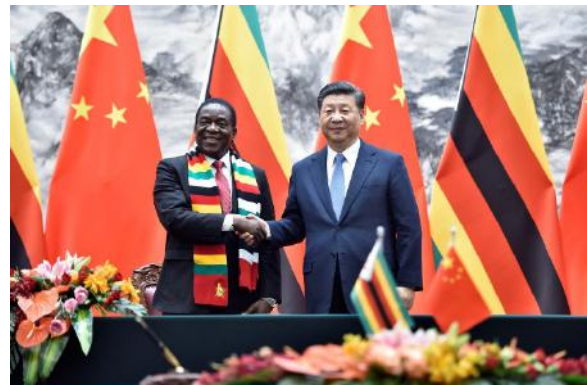
Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson said that “[t]he elections failed to make the mark.”¹⁰⁵ **Shortly after the 2018 election, state “police raided MDC [the opposition party] headquarters in the capital, Harare, arrested 27 people and took away computers. Security forces issued arrest warrants for MDC prime ministerial candidate Nelson Chamisa and allied parties’ leaders – although Chamisa himself not arrested [sic] – for illegal weapons possession and instigating violence,”** *The Washington Post* reported.¹⁰⁶

And it seems retribution was not just limited to opposition politicians. In the wake of the elections, *Foreign Policy* reported on soldiers “fir[ing] live ammunition at unarmed civilians protesting the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission’s failure to announce the outcome of the country’s July 30 presidential election in a timely fashion,” as well as “ongoing reports of soldiers beating and abducting civilians in the suburbs surrounding the country’s capital, Harare — a hotbed of opposition politics.”¹⁰⁷

Despite attempting to present himself on the international stage as a stark change from authoritarianism — notwithstanding the 2018 election — President Mnangagwa’s domestic record appears to be just as bad as Mugabe’s.¹⁰⁸

“Mr. Mnangagwa’s opponents now fear he is more dangerous than his predecessor,” *The New York Times* reported in 2019.¹⁰⁹ *The Times* also reported that, in his first 21 months in office, Mnangagwa had already imprisoned more people for subversion than Mugabe did in 37 years.¹¹⁰

There is one clear variation between the men that has made itself apparent in the three years since Mnangagwa took over. According to the *Times*’ article, “Mnangagwa tends to turn to the military [which helped him initially gain power] to keep the population in check,” rather than depend on militias and police like Mugabe.¹¹¹ It seems as though this differentiation is a bit of a distinction without a difference. The piece went on to state that “his critics say the result is the same: a repressive government that has a dangerously low tolerance for dissent.”¹¹²



Despite engaging in an international public relations offensive, Mnangagwa's efforts have fallen on deaf ears domestically, as his behavior has seemingly failed to match his rhetoric. Photo Credit: Parker Song/Pool via REUTERS <https://rb.gy/n5gyz6>.

But if the U.S. doesn’t pay for people to observe the “election” to take place in 2023, how will we know how bad the situation is?

Well, perhaps we could rely on the European Union, which sent election

observers in 2018 and will likely do so again in 2023, or others with a more vested stake in the outcome rather than duplicating or triplicating efforts.¹¹³

Will it all make any difference? Decades and decades of charges against Mugabe's elections did not cause him to become more democratic, nor did they drive him from office.

So why is the State Department spending \$10 million so it can have something to waive around when it ultimately points its finger at Zimbabwe's leadership and says, "Shame on you?"

LEMON SOCIALISM IN EASTERN EUROPE

USAID is open to spending up to \$2,000,000.00 to set up a venture capital fund in Bosnia & Herzegovina for bad investments



According to data cited by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), "United States small businesses employed 59.9 million people, or 47.3% of the private workforce, in 2016" and were responsible for 1.8 million net new jobs.¹¹⁴ It also noted that "[f]irms with fewer than 100 employees have the largest share of small business employment."¹¹⁵ It remains true, however, that one of the hardest things to

do in life is to start a successful business, and some reports indicate the failure rate for start-up businesses is as high as 90 percent.¹¹⁶

The situation has become even tougher for small businesses and entrepreneurs during the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Due to decades upon decades of Washington's bad habits, government has had to borrow trillions more to combat the economic downturn. It's simply an unavoidable truth that the federal government would have been better prepared to handle this emergency and help more Americans faster had it long ago determined to responsibly steward their hard-earned money.

As chronicled in this report and numerous other places, the federal government has chosen instead to look far and wide for any excuse to spend money faster than it takes it in.

Take this example, where the federal government showed its interest in stepping in with your money to help make things easier for small and new businesses ... in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).¹¹⁷

In a 2018 "Request for Information," USAID was open to spending the next five years and up to \$2 million helping set up a venture capital fund with the aim of "improv[ing] the flow of private capital and foster[ing] entrepreneurship to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), early stage enterprises ... and start-ups operating in BiH."¹¹⁸

Why couldn't these burgeoning entrepreneurs have gone to a bank? After all, banks seek good investments in businesses all the time, all around the world.

This fund would have distinguished itself, however, in one very important way. The USAID fund was not targeting what a bank might deem a good investment. **Instead, the fund would have helped businesses that couldn't get loans** in part due to what USAID describes as a climate where “[t]he banking sector, though very liquid, is held back by financial regulations or by the lack of appetite for riskier investments.”¹¹⁹ In other words, **USAID would engage in lemon socialism, where the government uses public money to extend the lives of businesses the market has deemed worthy of failure.**

While USAID is not acting on this idea at the moment, it's not for a lack of faith in the concept itself, per its response to my staff's inquiries regarding this program, and the door is open for returning to it in some form.¹²⁰

It's bad enough USAID was willing to step into another country's economy to help put a business on equal footing with its competitors at all. To make matters worse, it was setting out to support businesses the private sector had likely already decided to pass on!

Maybe USAID should instead invest the money in teaching its employees what is, and more importantly is not, a good use of Americans' tax dollars.

THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

The U.S. Agency for International Development is spending \$48,000,000.00 over 5 years to help disconnected Tunisian youth



One of the hardest parts of growing up is finding your purpose. Maybe you're a phenomenal athlete, destined to be a superstar in the NFL or NBA. Or maybe you're a science whiz with a future of making great strides in cancer research. Some people are just seemingly blessed with an obvious and pre-ordained path laid out for them, while others take longer to find their way.

But luckily for Tunisian youth, Uncle Sam will be lending a helping hand — a hand that's full of **\$48 million in Americans' tax dollars.**¹²¹ **What's that money going toward? It'll help Tunisian youth feel like they are not “a ‘challenge’ or ‘problem.’”**¹²²

So what's USAID actually going to do? It says it will conduct **“space refurbishment and renovations that will keep youth active and engaged in positive activities.”**¹²³ **Among its aims in Tunisia, it also seeks to “[c]atalyze public and private sector resources to create a sustainable foundation for social cohesion and resilience, at local and national levels.”**¹²⁴



This is the Kairouan Sport Complex before USAID paid to rehab it with American tax dollars. Photo Credit: USAID.

So far, USAID says it has paid to renovate “a stark, unused outdoor library space into a cultural hub.”¹²⁵ In another example, **USAID paid to “rehabilitate a dilapidated sports field into a recreational facility** where 6,000 local youth will play sports and games each year.”¹²⁶ In corresponding with my staff, USAID made clear that the refurbishment of the sports field was “just one activity executed as part of the opening of a youth center in Kairouan. The opening of the youth center reflects USAID’s commitment to helping provide youth with an opportunity to have their voice heard.”¹²⁷ USAID also said that Kairouan is just “one of the many that USAID is helping to refurbish across Tunisia, and it is part of our larger, youth focused program.”¹²⁸

Further, USAID disclosed that this grant “will also support the Ministry of Education’s effort to modernize Tunisia’s civic education

curriculum, and it will work directly with young people to develop other initiatives that are designed by them and tailored to meet their specific needs.”¹²⁹

So what brought this on? According to USAID, it is responding to a February 2015 study it says “found that young people in peri-urban areas of Tunis believe that the stigma associated with their neighborhoods prevents access to opportunities, including the ability to find work.”¹³⁰

If people from certain neighborhoods aren’t being hired based on where they come from, that is disconcerting. People should be judged based on their ability to do the job, not where they grew up.

But there is a distinction between addressing the findings of an old study that said Tunisians felt discriminated against because of where they live and renovating neighborhoods with parks and libraries — even while improving civic education. One must ask: is spending 48 million of U.S. taxpayer dollars on these efforts the best way to remove that stigma?

Meanwhile, according to a 2019 report by the Social Science Research Council, **the 2017 rate of “disconnected youth,”** which it



This is the Kairouan Sport Complex after USAID finished its rehab efforts. Photo Credit: USAID.

describes “as teens and young adults ages 16 to 24 who are neither in school nor working,” came in at “11.5 percent” here at home.¹³¹ While that may not seem like a lot, they note it “represents a total of about 4.5 million young people, or about one in nine.”¹³²

Civics education is in similarly dire straits at home. *The National Interest* reports the National Assessment of Educational Progress, conducted by the Department of Education, as finding that “[j]ust 23 percent of American eighth-graders are proficient in civics. ... [and] [t]hat figure falls to nine percent and 12 percent for African American and Hispanic students, respectively. Eighth graders fare even worse in U.S. history, with just 18 percent scoring proficient on the most recent administration of the test.”¹³³

If Uncle Sam is intent on spending this money, the least he could do is focus on his own nieces and nephews before globetrotting.

GOVERNMENT WASTE 101

The U.S. State Department is spending \$3,250,000.00 to send Russians to American community colleges for a “gap year”



There’s something the State Department loves about sending students from overseas to

American community colleges. Avid readers of *The Waste Report’s Platinum Pig Awards* may recall past admonishment of the State Department for spending \$15.8 million to send 390 foreign students to a year of American community college to get a credential in a vocational skill.¹³⁴

Well, the State Department is at it again, only this time it isn’t even couching the spending under the guise of credentialing foreign students. Instead, **it is spending \$3.25 million on a “gap year program” to place between 80 and 150 Russian students aged 18-20 at American community colleges for the 2020-2021 academic year.**¹³⁵

The Russian students enrolling at American community colleges will have a course schedule that includes English as a second language, as well as one additional American studies course (to include American history, foreign policy, literature, and more).¹³⁶ The rest of the student’s curriculum is up to the student.¹³⁷

Meanwhile, there are millions of American families, and high school graduates, who cannot afford college or a gap year trip!

Currently, in-state public community college students pay an average yearly tuition of around \$4,804.¹³⁸ **For comparison, the \$3.25 million the State Department is looking to spend could cover the cost of one year of community college for 676 Americans, or it could pay for 338 Americans to get their associate’s degrees on full scholarships.**¹³⁹

Instead, the State Department is frittering the money away so Russians can spend a year in the United States.

LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA, THE SEQUEL: WASTE IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

**U.S. State Department is spending
up to \$200,000.00 to host book
clubs for Pakistani and Afghan
kids**



Extracurricular activities, like sports and clubs, are often a means of exposing kids to people outside their normal socioeconomic environment. That is apparently the State Department’s goal in spending **\$200,000 to set up virtual book clubs in South Asia!**¹⁴⁰

That’s right! The State Department is paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to put together at least 12 virtual book clubs lasting from 1 to 3 years, with a minimum of 15 Afghans and 15 Pakistani kids each.¹⁴¹ State wants these clubs “to initiate dialogue and discussions around thematic areas, e.g. youth empowerment, democracy/human rights, tolerance/mutual understanding, among others, between youth audiences in Pakistan and Afghanistan.”¹⁴² Also, these book clubs have to be in English.¹⁴³

However, the World Bank estimates that roughly 200 million people (or 85% of the population) in Pakistan can’t access

the internet.¹⁴⁴ There is also no indication that the State Department intends to operate the book clubs through schools or public libraries, where people who don’t have access in their homes and daily lives could perhaps temporarily access the clubs.

The story in Afghanistan is even worse. Whereas there are over 30 million Pakistanis who can access the internet,¹⁴⁵ **just 3.5 million (10.6 percent) of Afghans have internet access.**¹⁴⁶ It seems the State Department might have designed book clubs for members of the Pakistani and Afghan elite class — those able to speak English and access the internet.

And what of the English-speaking requirement? According to the Central Intelligence Agency, **just a small fraction of Pakistanis speak English.**¹⁴⁷ In fact, the CIA calls English the “lingua franca of Pakistani elite and most government ministries.”¹⁴⁸ According to the BBC, “English ... [is] not even the most common first languag[e] in Pakistan, despite [its] official adoption.”¹⁴⁹ **Meanwhile in Afghanistan, the CIA estimates just six percent of people speak English.**¹⁵⁰

Not to mention, people in Afghanistan and Pakistan both speak Pashto.¹⁵¹ Imagine a book club for Americans and Canadians. Now imagine everybody had to speak German. Makes no sense, right?

This is hardly the first case of the State Department requiring its foreign aid programs to be conducted in English regardless of the native language of participants.¹⁵² **When the State Department does programs for non-English speakers, what’s the harm in letting them speak their own language,**

rather than limiting the pool of participants to those who already speak English?

Of course, Afghanistan and Pakistan have had a somewhat troubled geopolitical history, though always and exclusively “through,” the International Crisis Group has called it, “a narrow security prism.”¹⁵³

According to the Congressional Research Service, Pakistan and India’s approaches to Afghanistan have played off one another. “Pakistan’s security establishment, fearful of strategic encirclement by India, apparently continues to view the Afghan Taliban as a relatively friendly and reliably anti-India element in Afghanistan,” it writes.¹⁵⁴ It also states that “Indian interest in Afghanistan stems largely from India’s broader regional rivalry with Pakistan, which impedes Indian efforts to establish stronger and more direct commercial and political relations with Central Asia.”¹⁵⁵ **Which is to say that the conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan does not have to do with Pakistanis and Afghans themselves.**

In fact, in recent years, the governments of the two countries have taken steps to thaw their somewhat icy security relationship, beginning what the Pakistani government was reported in 2019 as calling “a new chapter of friendship and cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, based on mutual trust and harmony and for advancing the cause of peace, stability and prosperity in the region.”¹⁵⁶

More dialogue and diplomacy, especially on big issues, are absolutely needed and should be encouraged.

But it doesn’t seem like it would take much discussion, virtual or otherwise, to conclude

that the State Department can find more effective ways to use your tax dollars to achieve its goals.

**USING AMERICAN SMALL
BUSINESSES’ TAX DOLLARS TO
HELP ... TUNISIAN SMALL
BUSINESSES**

***The U.S. Department of State is
spending \$700,000.00 to make
Tunisian Chambers of Commerce
better***



A Chamber of Commerce is a collection of businesses that band together to advocate for creating more business-friendly environments. They can be a helpful resource to draw commerce to economically underdeveloped areas. And thanks to a generous donation from the State Department, Tunisian Chambers of Commerce will be flush with up to \$700,000 of Americans’ money!¹⁵⁷

The State Department will be cutting checks so that an NGO (non-governmental organization) will teach the Chambers of Commerce of Gabes, Gafsa, and Beja, Tunisia — rural areas — to be better.¹⁵⁸ How exactly will the NGO accomplish that? Well, the State Department suggests a grantee

should undertake initiatives such as “[i]ncreas[ing] the skills of staff [of the Chambers of Commerce] to support and engage constructively with member businesses,” as well as helping them “[a]ttract investment and spur the creation of new businesses in the respective regions,” grow “membership for each Chamber,” and more.¹⁵⁹

The CIA states that, due to a drop in tourism after “[s]uccessive terrorist attacks,” as well as worker strikes, Tunisia’s economy experienced a period of “slowed growth from 2015 to 2017.”¹⁶⁰

The World Bank takes a different approach, believing economic growth in Tunisia is, for the foreseeable future, fundamentally hamstrung due to “the fragility of the banking sector and high indebtedness severely hamper[ing] growth,” according to a report.¹⁶¹ Now, let’s assume for the sake of discussion that either (or both) the CIA or the World Bank are making accurate assessments. Would State’s objectives make any sort of substantial difference, never mind \$700,000 worth, in the face of such fundamental issues? Of course not!

So why is Uncle Sam doing this? Well, according to the State Department, a lack of resources has left the rural regions of Tunisia underdeveloped compared to the more urban areas, which in turn is “contributing to Tunisia’s long-standing, systemic regional inequality.”¹⁶² Is it Uncle Sam’s job to fix that?

Keep in mind, Tunisia isn’t the only country in the world with “long-standing, systemic regional inequality.” Believe it or not, the United States has a pretty large case of that, as well.

Here at home, the American Enterprise Institute published data indicating that **rural American areas lag behind suburban and urban areas when it comes to job growth, per capita income growth, percentage of the population with broadband internet access, and educational attainment, all of which serve as economic indicators of underdevelopment.**¹⁶³

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) claims “[p]overty rates are highest in the most rural, isolated settings, and the gap between poverty rates in these and other settings has grown.”¹⁶⁴ USDA also reports that “[r]eal personal income per person (PIPP) was significantly higher and grew faster in metro counties than in nonmetro counties during 2010-17.”¹⁶⁵

If Uncle Sam thinks national regional imbalance is a problem and is worried about regional economic discrepancies within a single country, we’ve got plenty of room for improvement on both counts at home.

THE FESTIVUS REPORT 2020



**Environment, Energy,
Science**



Wasting Americans' tax dollars, the federal government...

- Walked lizards on a treadmill (NSF) \$1,557,083.00
- Funds the Boating Infrastructure Grant Program (FWS) \$13,545,889.40
- Bought public transit buses for localities (FTA) \$129,956,625.00
- Studied how people cooperate while playing e-sport video games (NSF) \$199,864.00
- Hired “interns” to do busy work (NPS) \$57,576.75
- Studied how New Yorkers abided by New York City COVID lockdowns (NSF) \$199,995.00
- Taught students in Washington about disputed climate science (NSF) \$487,528.00
- Subsidizes an insect ranching company’s R&D efforts (NSF) \$1,304,454.00
- Develops a wearable headset to track eating behavior (NSF) \$2,075,074.00
- Studies how food options change when a neighborhood is revitalized (NSF) \$260,000.00

TAXPAYER DOLLARS WASTED: \$149,644,089.15

LIZARD ON A TREADMILL

Researchers spent funds from National Science Foundation grants worth \$1,557,083.00 to walk lizards on a treadmill



Pay enough attention to government waste and you'll start to hear about a few projects that are so crazy, they live on in the memory long after they've stopped being funded. Some of my personal favorites include a multi-year NIH study of the sexual promiscuity of Japanese quail while on cocaine, costing roughly \$850,000, as well as what has come to be known as "Shrimp on a Treadmill," a project on which the National Science Foundation (NSF) spent \$682,570 to literally run a shrimp on an underwater treadmill.¹

Well, now the NSF is back at it, only instead of putting a shrimp on a treadmill, they paid researchers to put a lizard on a treadmill, and the researchers used funds from grants worth \$1,557,083 to do it!²

So, how does one go about walking lizards on a treadmill? Well first, you have to get some lizards, of course! These researchers went out and found six lizards to be exact— three savannah monitor lizards (*Varanus exanthematicus*) and three Argentine black and white tegus lizards

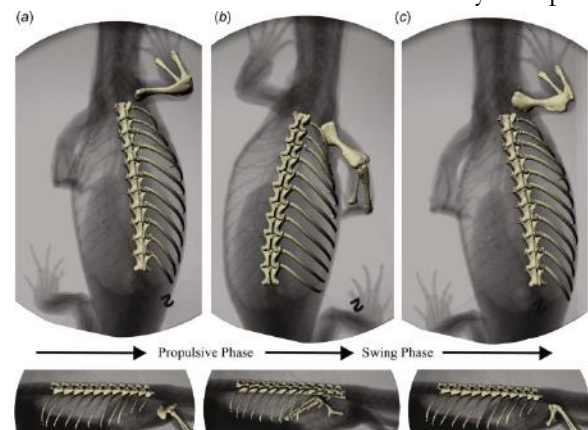
(*Salvator merianae*).³ Then, they walked them on a teeny-tiny treadmill.⁴

You might be asking yourself why, exactly, scientists would do such a thing. Well, the truth is that they didn't only run them on a treadmill. While the lizards were getting their workout, the scientists "used XROMM [a 3D imaging technology that takes multiple X-rays and reanimates them as 3D bones in a 3D space]⁵ to measure the flexion of the vertebral column and the 3D rotations of ribs relative to their corresponding vertebrae."⁶

In layman's terms, researchers spent a million and a half taxpayer dollars to get six lizards, walk them on a treadmill while taking X-rays with 3D imaging technology, and then figure out how their joints moved.

Most research on animals is justified by providing humans some sort of knowledge. For example, we test drugs on mice before we give them to humans. If the goal here was to study how human joints move, I've got some good news for the research team... we know that already. I can confirm as much. I learned all about it in medical school.

So, what exactly did taxpayers pay for when researchers used their money to put



Photos taken from the lizards' cardio session. Photo Credit: <https://rb.gv/q15tlq>.

lizards on a treadmill? A big fat question mark. **Researchers never actually got an answer to the question of how the lizards' joints moved.** According to them, "Although further work is needed to establish what causes these rib motions, active contraction of the hypaxial musculature may be at least partly responsible."⁷

Money well spent, indeed.

YACHT SUBSIDIES

The Fish & Wildlife Service spent \$13,546,889.40 in FY20 on the Boating Infrastructure Grant Program



If you've ever had occasion to sit on the banks of the Ohio River in Kentucky, or the Potomac River in Washington, D.C., you might see a fair few boaters enjoying a leisurely trip down either river in their fancy yachts. What you might not know is that it might be thanks to the Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) Program operated by the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), **which spent \$13,546,889.40 of your tax dollars in Fiscal Year 2020 on programs including yacht subsidies.**

What exactly is the BIG Program? Well, the "BIG [Program] provides grant funds to the states, the District of Columbia and insular areas to construct, renovate, and maintain tie-up facilities with features for transient boaters in vessels 26 feet or more in length."⁸ **These grants aren't the discretion of some nameless bureaucrat, either. The Director of the FWS has to sign off on them before they go out the door.**⁹

What's the BIG Idea?

Funds the BIG distributes are classified under two tiers. Tier I is a non-competitive grant under which all eligible recipients are able to receive up to \$200,000 per year.¹⁰ Tier II, however, is a different story. Tier II programs are competitive, received and reviewed, and evaluated for quality. So what types of programs get Tier II funding?

Let's take a trip down to Texas, to Galveston Bay in particular. In 2019, one Laguna Harbor received \$1,494,199 in BIG Program funds. What exactly is Laguna Harbor? Well, in addition to being "the



This is a 2 bedroom, 2.5 bath, nearly 1,900 square foot house in Laguna Harbor, one of many of the sort. Laguna Harbor got BIG money in 2019. Getting the picture of where your tax dollars went? Photo Credit: <https://rb.gy/z5mny2>.

premier place in the entire Galveston Bay region where you can securely dock your

vessel,” you can dock it “in your own backyard.”¹¹ That’s right! **Laguna Harbor is a luxury housing complex.**¹² At Laguna Harbor, empty lots are sold for anywhere from \$89,000 to \$500,000.¹³ One can only imagine what the cost of actually purchasing a house in this luxury community would be.

Not getting the idea of what sorts of projects this program funds? Let’s swing through southern Florida, to Fort Lauderdale specifically, and look at the Las Olas Marina project, proud recipient of federal BIG Program funds. This summer, the Mayor of Fort Lauderdale tweeted about the Las Olas Marina project.¹⁴ **In his tweets, he touted the contribution of BIG Program funds, \$1,114,354 in fact,¹⁵ “toward [Fort Lauderdale’s] plans to expand the marina to allow more yachts as well as larger yachts to dock there.”¹⁶** Specifically, FWS, using your hard-earned tax dollars, will be funding the expansion of the Las Olas Marina

Mayor Dean J. Trantalis
@DeanTrantalis

Today, I met with @SecBernhardt, the nation's Secretary of the Interior, to discuss the Las Olas Marina project. The federal govt. is contributing a boat infrastructure grant toward our plans to expand the marina to allow more yachts as well as larger yachts to dock there. 1/2

Secretary David Bernhardt and 4 others

Your tax dollars funded the capacity for "more yachts as well as larger yachts" to dock at a marina in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. How excellent! Photo Credit: FSO Staff.

to make space for 25 additional vessels (currently there are 60 slips) for boats 26 to 200 feet in length.¹⁷ FWS touts the expansion because it “will provide all utility components required to support all eligible vessels up to 200 feet in length.”¹⁸

There’s an old quote from Ian Fleming’s James Bond novels that applies here: “Once is happenstance. Twice is coincidence. Three times is enemy action.”¹⁹ It is in that spirit that I would ask you to take a trip up the East Coast with me from Florida, to Charleston Harbor Resort and Marina, in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. Charleston Harbor Resort and Marina is the proud owner of \$1,500,000 in Tier II BIG Program funds, to construct 30 new slips for yachts.²⁰ What else will you find at the Charleston Harbor Resort and Marina? **According to its website, you can experience “sophisticated style with gracious hospitality,” which apparently includes amenities such as a private beach, riverside pools, aqua golf, a spa, crab hunting, free trolley access to downtown, beach fire pits, a 30-person movie theater, yoga classes, and sessions with certified personal trainers.**²¹

Where Does the Money Come From?

While most programs the federal government operates require Congress to give it money each year, the BIG Program is self-funded, using two percent of the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund as its source of money.²² Good, right? Avoids the chance of avid boaters who are members of Congress from funding a pet project of theirs. Well, you might think so, until you hear exactly where the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust fund gets its money.

In reality, the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust fund gets its money from a 3% tax on electric motors, a 10% tax on fishing equipment, a small engine fuel tax, a motorboat fuel tax, import duties on a number of boating-related goods including tackle, as well as interest the trust fund earns on its own.

That's right: the federal government is literally reverse Robin Hood: taxing everyday boaters and fishermen to make it easier to dock your boat outside your mansion, or at the beach!

LOW OR NO EFFICIENCY SPENDING

***The Federal Transit
Administration spent
\$129,956,625.00 to buy public
transit buses for localities***



When the Framers of the Constitution left the Constitutional Convention in 1787, they announced a proposal for a federal government with limited powers and limited responsibilities. One can only wonder about their exasperation to learn of the Low or No Program at the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). While the program might be, strictly speaking, constitutional, **there can be no doubt that the Low or No Program, which**

spent \$129,956,625 in 2020 to subsidize the purchase of local public transit buses, is a colossal waste of money and, not to mention, something that is not the FTA's responsibility.²³

This Program has Low or No Purpose

The Low or No Program is a subsidy program “for the purchase or lease of zero-emission or low-emission transit buses, including acquisition, construction, and leasing of required supporting facilities.”²⁴ **For example, the program gives funds to entities like the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (which received \$153 million in Americans' taxpayer funds in FY20), which got \$4.1 million “to purchase new electric buses, associated charging equipment, and infrastructure improvements.”**²⁵

Interestingly, the FTA “recognizes that significant transformation is occurring in the transit bus industry, with the increasing availability of low and zero emission bus vehicles,”²⁶ even without the influx of cash from the Low or No Program. Congress is, however, apparently not content with letting the market work it's will, and made “\$55 million per year” available until Fiscal Year 2020 under the FAST Act of 2015.²⁷

So, how are they spending nearly \$130 million you ask? Well, as part of the Fiscal Year 2020 appropriation for the Department of Transportation, they bumped up the program's budget to \$170 million, disregarding the program's authorization,²⁸ an all-too-familiar phenomenon.

The Costs Associated

Exactly how much do these buses cost? Well, a typical transit bus costs between \$200,000 and \$280,000 a pop, depending on size.²⁹ Meanwhile, the sticker cost of the average electric bus is roughly \$750,000, and a fuel cell bus costs over \$1,000,000.³⁰ But that's only the up-front cost. The cost of maintaining and operating these buses is even more expensive. The all-in cost of an electric bus is roughly \$1,000,000, and it's about \$1,400,000 for a compressed natural gas bus.³¹ **Meaning, per unit, FTA is paying an upcharge of anywhere from \$1.1 million to \$250,000.**

And it gets worse. Most of the Fiscal Year 2020 funds went to purchasing electric buses.³² **Electric motors last roughly 400,000 miles.³³ Conversely, “diesel engines continuously run 1,000,000 to 1,500,000 miles before major overhaul.”³⁴** It's one thing to purchase more expensive buses for environmental purposes if the longevity is similar to that of a traditional diesel combustible engine; it's another to do so at a higher price and for an electric bus that will need replacing long before its diesel engine counterpart will. But don't worry, FTA isn't shouldering this increased burden on its own. **It requires localities to pay a minimum of 15 percent of the purchasing cost of any acquisition, and 10% of the net cost of the project overall.³⁵**

The Framers of the Constitution explicitly constructed a government of *limited powers and responsibilities*. If localities decide they want to splash the cash on more expensive transit buses with a shorter lifespan, that's fine. That is their call. What they cannot then do,

however, is stick the federal government and American taxpayers with the bill.

THE NSF IS PLAYING GAMES WITH YOUR MONEY

The National Science Foundation is spending \$199,864.00 to see how people cooperate while playing e-sport video games



If you're a parent of a tween or a teenager, you might have noticed they've started going online to watch other people play video games, rather than play video games themselves. They're not alone. The e-sports industry, “competitive, organized video gaming,”³⁶ has seen “tremendous growth over the years both in terms of viewership and revenue.”³⁷ From 2016 to 2018, e-sports' global viewing audience has grown from 281 million to 380 million, with projections to reach a total audience of more than half a billion people by 2021.³⁸

Popular games include “Fortnite, League of Legends, Counter-Strike, Call of Duty, Overwatch, and Madden NFL, to name a few.”³⁹ **Not one to be left behind, enter the National Science Foundation, which is spending \$199,864 to see how people cooperate when playing e-sport video games.⁴⁰**

Specifically, researchers have two aims: first, how players choosing teams influences the team's performance, and second, how "software and database patches disrupt mental models and decision-making."⁴¹ The project has yet to produce any findings but will last from 2018-2021.⁴² But surely, the researchers are simply using e-sports as a conduit for examining the physiological dynamics of decision-making, right? Right?



E-sports have become increasingly popular in recent years but wasting Americans' hard-earned tax dollars is as unpopular as ever. Photo Credit: Adobe.

Well, in truth, the researchers have predicted the project will accomplish three goals: (1) "provide comparative empirical insights into a rapidly growing cultural and economic phenomenon" that is e-sports, (2) "develop frameworks and models to increase engagement in sociotechnical systems" (in other words, make e-sports more accessible to more people), and (3) "provide generalizable recommendations for improving the performance of temporary virtual teams."⁴³

Maybe the NSF thinks wasteful spending is a game, but I can assure you, a \$26 trillion dollar debt and multi-trillion dollar deficit we, our kids, and our grandkids will have to pay off say differently.

INTERNS ... WHAT ARE THEY GOOD FOR?

The National Parks Service spent \$57,576.75 on busy work for two classes of "interns"

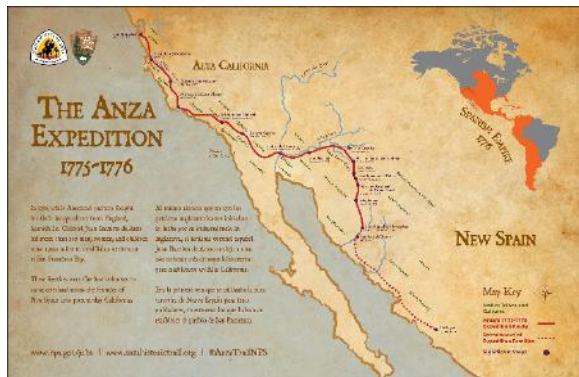


We all know what the value of an internship is. Internships allow interns to gain critical workforce experience while exposing them to a potential field in which they can pursue permanent employment when their internship ends. Offices, like mine, use interns to supplement and assist staff in performing vital tasks intrinsic to the responsibilities and duties of the office.

Somebody at the National Parks Service (NPS) must have missed the memo, however, because **NPS spent \$57,576.75 putting together a program for two sessions of interns, eight (yep, just eight) interns in the fall and up to ten this coming spring,**⁴⁴ beginning in September 2020 who are not involved in supplementing the day-to-day operations of the National Parks Service.⁴⁵ The program will be run by the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail.⁴⁶

The Anza Trail is a 1,200 mile long trail tracing the path of Lieutenant Colonel Juan Bautista de Anza on his trip from Arizona, up

the California coast, to establish San Francisco, a trip lasting from 1775-76.⁴⁷ While the Anza Trail is a national park, NPS does not own or manage the resources or land it comprises, but instead partners with other federal, state, and local authorities, along with non-profits, private landowners, and other stakeholders who care for the trail.⁴⁸



The Anza Trail spans two states, from the current-day Arizona-Mexico border all the way up the California Coast to San Francisco. Photo Credit: <https://rb.gy/ln2uva>.

Under such circumstances, interns could have been exposed to the intricacies of cross-governmental cooperation or perhaps learned about how to, as NPS does, recruit volunteers to help maintain the Anza Trail.⁴⁹ Of course, coronavirus has impacted all of our business operations, including in the southwest, and so the folks responsible for this program have worked “to create a hybrid program (hands-on and virtual) that will be engaging for young people and teachers.”⁵⁰

Their plan? The interns will not even be in the office during business hours!⁵¹ Instead, they’ll meet once a week, on Saturday from 8 am to 3 pm, as well as have “biweekly check-ins on Zoom.”⁵²

So if the interns (if you can even call them that) aren’t helping with any of that, what are they doing?

It turns out, rather than hiring interns to help NPS fulfill its mission, NPS has entered into a cooperative agreement with a non-governmental organization (which, incidentally, is only chipping in about \$6,000 compared to the American taxpayer’s nearly \$60,000) to facilitate a program for interns who had already worked with the private organization,⁵³ the purpose of which was to “visit and learn about sites along the Anza Trail” in Arizona.⁵⁴ That’s right. **Eight interns will be spending their fall not picking up transferrable work skills or learning about how NPS operates. Instead, they’ll be traveling around Pima and Santa Cruz counties, in Arizona, and, ultimately, they will “share their knowledge with the public through presentations.”**⁵⁵

As part of their oversight work, my staff asked NPS why it puts on programs such as these, that do not actually support the agency’s operations but rather just have interns trek around on their own under the guidance of a non-governmental organization. In justifying the program, **NPS HQ in Washington, D.C. did not attempt to defend the prudence of this cooperative agreement, instead opting to defend its legality.**⁵⁶ Specifically, NPS looked to a particular section of federal law in which Congress has directed the Secretary of the Interior, who oversees the National Parks Service, to, “when deemed to be in the public interest,” enter into cooperative agreements with private organizations (among others) to maintain any portion of federal trails.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, the Superintendent of the Anza Trail said she was hoping the students’ participation would help improve public understanding of the area, environment, history, the tribal understanding of the land,

and its ecology.⁵⁸ Far be it from me to second guess the superintendent of the Trail, but if your goal is to educate the public at-large, giving two dozen kids something to do on Saturday morning and early afternoon is a poor way of doing it.

While NPS is correct that entering into agreements such as these is not illegal, one cannot help but question the public interest being served by this program (unless you count the people traveling around Arizona on the taxpayer's dime to be part of the public). Not to mention, one can also take issue with the characterization of a program designed to “promote an understanding and appreciation of the story and legacy of the Juan Bautista de Anza expedition and the Anza Trail through youth education programming” as maintaining a portion of a federal trail.⁵⁹

In truth NPS, in its plans for this program, does not appear to seek to use this program to maintain the Anza Trail, or to support NPS functions. Instead, these kids were given free trips around Arizona so they could get jazzed about the Anza Trail.

If people and groups, like this private organization with which the NPS has partnered, want to get kids excited about the Anza Trail, that's great. It's an important part of the history of Arizona and California. Just leave the American taxpayer out of it.

WASTED LOCKDOWNS

The National Science Foundation is spending \$199,995.00 to get people to walk around New York City with cameras to see if people changed their behavior after coronavirus lockdowns began



With the benefit of hindsight, we can affirmatively say that in early March 2020, state and local leaders overreacted. Many were citing a projection out of the Imperial College in Great Britain which actually predicted 2.2 million deaths in the United States — enough to get everybody's attention.⁶⁰ Of course, the study was immediately seized upon by proponents of draconian government lockdowns.⁶¹ We know now that model was flawed from the beginning.⁶² But it was not before cities like New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Chicago, and many other states and localities instituted lockdowns. And in that haze, the National Science Foundation (NSF) issued a \$199,995 grant to a team of researchers at New York University to deputize people to walk around the city to see if they changed their public behavior after the New York City lockdown began.⁶³

Research Design Flaws

Now, figuring out how New Yorkers responded to the job-killing protocols of Mayor Bill de Blasio, and to the rules handed down by Andrew Cuomo, the latter of whom is responsible for the worst public health decision in a century, a decision worthy of impeachment, is an interesting enough question, I guess. But is the NSF funding research that will answer those questions? Not even close.

The NSF-funded researchers will recruit 65 volunteers and strap “GPS-enabled camera[s] and ‘smart’ watch[es]” to them for the purpose of recording “where they are and what they see as they move through public spaces while complying with social distancing and other pandemic-related measures.”⁶⁴ The study’s participants “also make simultaneous audio recordings describing in real-time what they are doing and why. For example, choosing to jaywalk across a busy street because the sidewalk was too crowded to maintain social distancing.”⁶⁵

To state the obvious, it’s unlikely that this study will derive any real, useful, results. First and foremost, New York City is a major world city, with a population just shy of 20 million people.⁶⁶ **Using snapshots in time by 65 people, rather than using a representative or statistically significant sample, makes the findings useless for drawing broad conclusions about New York City residents writ large.**

While researchers claim their project has “gathered well over 25 million data points... and expects to eventually generate over a billion data points before the project is

complete,” they also claim that “every second at every location a participant visits becomes a potential data point.”⁶⁷ Suffices to say, this is an insane standard for what constitutes a data point. Why stop at just a second? The project could have trillions, even quadrillions of data points if the project deems fractions of seconds to be data points... After all, humans often have split-second reactions!

If a private company wants to stomp all over privacy rights and track individuals’ behavior as they abide, or not, by social distancing protocols in New York City, that is that company’s prerogative, and the prerogative of individuals as to whether to opt in to or out of using the technology the company is using to track them. But to stick the American taxpayer with the bill for this poorly concocted and wasteful study is another question entirely.

But again, the silliness of this study pales in comparison to the silliness of protracted lockdowns. As Greg Ip so eloquently wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*, “the evidence suggests lockdowns were an overly blunt and economically costly tool.”⁶⁸ Perhaps that was the reason that “prior to COVID-19, lockdowns weren’t part of the standard epidemic tool kit,” or “part of the contemporary playbook, either.” Rest assured, there are some of us in Washington, D.C., who recognize how terrible a policy choice lockdowns were, and we are steadfast in our resolve to never impose such a, to quote Mr. Ip, “blunt and economically costly tool” again.

TRUST THE SCIENTISTS, EVEN IF THEY'RE NOT CERTAIN IF THEY ARE ACCURATE

***The National Science Foundation
is spending \$487,528.00 to teach
students in the State of
Washington about disputed
climate science***



There are lots of bold statements about the future of the environment. Climate advocates are heralded as prophets in our time. But in truth, a lot of environmental science is postulations, guesses, and, not to mention, a lot of “fact-based predictions” that have subsequently been determined to be laughably wrong.⁶⁹ For as much as we know about environmental science, there’s just as much that we don’t know. **This makes the choice the National Science Foundation (NSF) made to cut a \$487,528 check to a professor at the University of Washington to teach climate science that the professor, and NSF, admit is unclear even more shocking.**⁷⁰

Trust the Scientists, or Something

Sometimes, science is pretty straight forward. For example, we all learned at a

young age that when you mix a hydrogen molecule with two oxygen molecules, you’ll get H₂O, or water. Other science is less straight forward. In this case, the researchers are “introduc[ing] climate science to the classroom at the high school, college, and graduate school levels.”⁷¹ Their goal, they say, “is to introduce the climate system in an accessible form... [using] simple models ... which use one or two equations to represent the evolution of global temperature” responding to greenhouse gases (GHGs).⁷² Meanwhile, however, researchers admit that “the extent to which the impact of greenhouse gas increases on global temperature can be represented by a single, fixed sensitivity value is unclear.”⁷³

To summarize, the grantee is attempting to correlate climate sensitivity (the extent to which the temperature changes in response to GHG concentrations) despite saying it is not clear that such a correlation could or would be scientifically relevant, and then disseminating that information to students as authoritative.⁷⁴

The Sky is Falling, or So They Say

For too long, environmental science has been chocked full of Chicken Little-style doomsday predictions that have simply not come to pass. There are more than are countable, but here are some less-than-precise predictions by scientists...

In 2009, ABC News put together a TV special called “Earth 2100,” centering on the idea that “within the next century, life as we know it could come to an end. Our civilization could crumble, leaving only traces of modern human existence behind” thanks to climate change.⁷⁵ ABC admitted,

“It seems outlandish, extreme -- even impossible. But according to cutting edge scientific research, it is a very real possibility.”⁷⁶

An outlier, I hear you say? Time and again climate scientists have predicted the world would reach “peak oil.” **In 1980, they predicted peak oil would occur in 2000.⁷⁷ In 1996, they predicted it’d come in 2020, and in 2002.⁷⁸ They predicted this year, 2010, we would reach peak oil.⁷⁹ In truth, U.S. crude oil production reached an all-time high in 2019.⁸⁰**

Not getting the idea? In 2004, a Pentagon report was breathlessly reported as saying **“European cities will be sunk beneath rising seas as Britain is plunged into a ‘Siberian’ climate by 2020. Nuclear conflict, mega-droughts, famine and widespread rioting will erupt across the world” due to climate change.**⁸¹ Rather than dismiss the doomsday predictions for what they were, “senior climatologists, however, believe[d] that their verdicts could prove the catalyst in forcing [former President] Bush to accept climate change as a real and happening phenomenon. They also hope it will convince the United States to sign up to global treaties to reduce the rate of climate change.”⁸²

And that’s always the end goal, isn’t it? These doomsday scenarios are always — *always, always, always* — avoidable if and only if we cede control and blindly follow the policies environmentalists espouse. First, they wanted the U.S. to sign up for what would become the Kyoto Protocol. Then, when that didn’t do the trick, it was the Paris Climate Agreement that would save the world. And now, it’s the Green

New Deal that’s our golden ticket. What a crazy coincidence that is.

One of the big points, too, that you often hear from climate scientists is that it’s “settled.” But this study seems to say otherwise, and both cannot be correct. So, if the science really is settled, and we know how and to what extent GHGs are affecting the environment, then why are we teaching kids things we know to be false? But what if the researchers conducting this study are correct, and we can’t really quantify the extent to which GHGs impact the environment? If that’s the case, then clearly the science is not settled (hint: it’s not settled), and we should refrain from jumping into multilateral climate deals like the Paris Climate Agreement.

But I don’t just cite these examples to fill in the gaps so often omitted from debates over environmental policy. The NSF, fully aware of the lack of certainty surrounding this incredibly contentious political issue, is sanctioning the dissemination of information designed to influence our young people to believe one thing or another, despite, again, researchers saying that “the extent to which the impact of greenhouse gas increases on global temperature can be represented by a single, fixed sensitivity value is unclear.”⁸³ Rightly or wrongly, the NSF carries substantial weight in the scientific community. It’s sanction of this project, one that purports to push less-than-substantiated science, undermines that credibility.

It’s long past time for us to move our conversation around how to handle and balance priorities around energy cultivation past the Chicken Little-style prognostications of the sky falling. When the NSF funds studies

buying into that mentality and uses your tax dollars to do it, it just compounds an already existing problem.

FARMERS, WELL, MEALWORM FARMERS, ARE THIS NATION'S BACKBONE, NSF SAYS

The National Science Foundation is spending \$1,304,454.00 to subsidize an insect ranching company's research and development efforts



If there's anything antithetical to the free market economic system that has raised billions of people out of extreme poverty, it is letting the government pick winners and losers. And that's exactly what **the National Science Foundation did when it cut a \$1,304,454 check to an insect ranching company to subsidize its research and development as it attempts to turn insects into protein feed for livestock animals.**⁸⁴

What in the world is insect ranching, you might ask? Well, you know how ranchers out west raise cattle and other livestock? Well, this company does the same thing, only instead of raising Angus, Charolais, or Herefords, they're

raising mealworms to be ground up and fed to animals.

Corporate Welfare on the Public Dime

The overwhelming majority of grants the NSF makes are to research institutions and researchers. This grant is different. Rather than doing basic research, answering a question worth asking, **the company receiving the \$1.3 million justified their work as "allow[ing] us to establish insects as the world's [sic.] most sustainable animal feed ingredient, and to disrupt the \$400B animal feed market."**⁸⁵ The company has dubbed itself "insect entrepreneurs."⁸⁶ But in fairness, they must be clever entrepreneurs in general too, going to the government for a free \$1.3 million rather than selling equity in exchange for investments.

The company is hardly in its infancy, either. It already sells mealworm feed, which it recommends for farmed fish, swine, poultry, and to feed to pets, along with "mealworm frass," an insect manure.⁸⁷ But these products are insufficient, apparently, and the company will be doing research and development with NSF funds, including designing equipment, determining strategies to create a maximum yield of viable mealworms for protein feed, and figuring out what causes mealworms to die.⁸⁸ **Thanks to you, the American taxpayer, the company's R&D costs have been cut by 80 percent.**⁸⁹

It's remarkable, yet unsurprising, the NSF did not see this grant for what it was: pure corporate welfare. Apparently, the hand-waving the company did by stating the research will "produce several patents" (think taxpayers are going to get a cut of the profits of those patents?), as well as "inform the design of a

scalable insect ranching facility,” it somehow becomes basic scientific research that NSF “has deemed worthy of support through evaluation using the Foundation’s intellectual merit and broader impacts review criteria?”⁹⁰ Please.

NSF FUNDS MEALTIME HEADGEAR

The National Science Foundation is spending \$2,075,074.00 to develop a wearable headset to track eating behavior



For a time, it seemed like everybody was wearing a Bluetooth headset in their ear. You know the type – the small earpiece that lets people talk on the phone hands free. It was so ubiquitous at one point, but now, Bluetooth doesn’t even mention them in their annual market update.⁹¹ Yet despite style and trends moving on, the National Science Foundation (NSF) is stuck in the past, as **it funds, to the tune of \$2,075,074, a wearable headset to track eating behavior.**⁹²

So what exactly is being done with your money? **Researchers at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, as a part of the Auracle Project, made a prototype of a wearable earpiece designed to capture the “sound of**

a person chewing as it passes through the bone and tissue of the wearer’s head.”⁹³

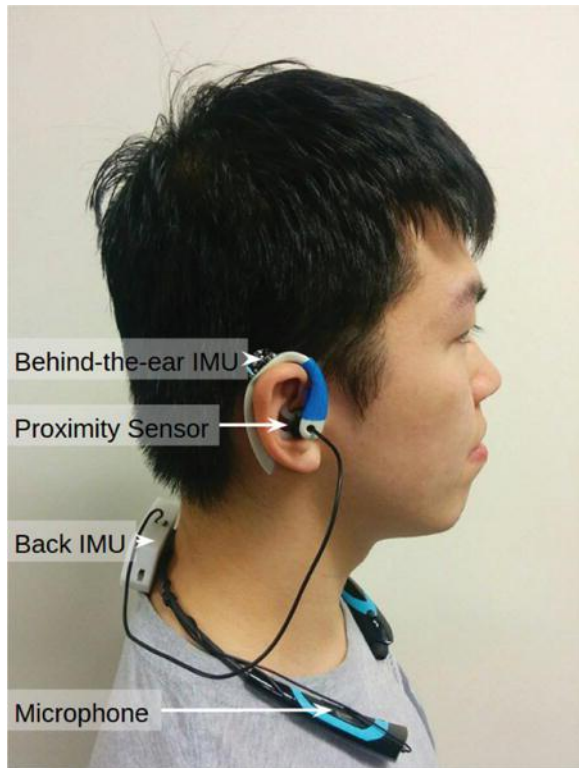
The idea was to create “a wearable earpiece that can automatically recognize eating behavior.”⁹⁴

That’s it, that’s how they spent your money – on a glorified microphone. They wanted to develop something comfortable that could detect eating sessions, as a first step in a long-term goal of having people wear earpieces that could track calorie intake, in an effort to “support the validation and deployment of effective behavioral-health interventions that promote healthy diet and behavior.”⁹⁵



Picture of the NSF-funded Auracle prototype. Photo Credit: <https://bit.ly/32dmWDn>.

Sounds like a novel idea, right? Well, as it turns out, there’s already a privately-funded company attempting to do effectively the same thing as this NSF-funded endeavor.⁹⁶ Attempting to help assuage chronic diseases such as diabetes or eating disorders by improving “food journaling,” which they argue “is subject to self-bias and recall errors,” the team proposed a new item: “EarBit, a wearable system that detects eating moments.”⁹⁷ To make matters worse, **the NSF awarded funds to the Dartmouth research team AFTER the private team published their work.**⁹⁸



EarBit, a privately funded effort to do what the NSF-funded Auracle is trying to do. Photo Credit: <https://bit.ly/2DJCFR3>.

It remains to be seen how either the EarBit or Auracle work out in practice. But it is already clear that the government shouldn't be propping up a retreat of a privately funded research team. If this system works, let the team that thought of it and raised the money on their own prosper off their ingenuity. And if it should fail, it is irresponsible to socialize the risk among the American taxpaying public by subsidizing the taxpayer-funded competitor's effort.

DINING OUT ON THE NSF'S OBLIVIOUSNESS

The National Science Foundation is spending \$260,000.00 to study how food options change when a neighborhood is revitalized



Up until recently, cities were undergoing a renaissance. It seemed like every day, new high rises were being raised in cities... except San Francisco, where NIMBY'ers block the construction of new housing to help assuage the area's exorbitant housing costs and connected rampant homelessness crisis.⁹⁹ But most everywhere else, cities were, and remain, rapidly changing. Despite pre-existing research largely answering the question, **the National Science Foundation (NSF) has invested \$260,000 to study how food options – “restaurants, groceries, food trucks, etc. are changing as a result of development pressures.”¹⁰⁰**

Objective Fact-Driven Research or Confirmation Bias?

So, what exactly is being studied? The primary investigator (PI) running the project, which lasts from July 2020 through June 2025, described her work as follows: “This project systematically investigates the ways that

restaurants, groceries, food trucks, etc. are changing as a result of development pressures, identify [sic.] where and how new food landscapes are constructed, and determine the implications of this relocation on cultural, social, and economic outcomes.”¹⁰¹

It’s an interesting enough sociological question, in theory, particularly given the fluctuations cities are experiencing. So interesting, in fact, that **researchers have already examined and largely answered the question.**

Researchers published work in 2016 on the topic of how whether or not gentrification is a “threat or opportunity” for small businesses in New York City, studying a period covering 1990-2011.¹⁰²

They found “a majority of small businesses continued to operate after gentrification was up and running.”¹⁰³ Moreover, they were also able to determine that just 22 percent of neighborhoods experiencing influxes of new people and new money experienced coinciding displacement of pre-existing residents.¹⁰⁴

These data points would seem to suggest that gentrification, in the vast overwhelming majority of instances, doesn’t actually displace existing businesses.

Shouldn’t the NSF have known, then, about the landmark 2016 sociological study investigating the same question the PI seeks to answer? And shouldn’t the NSF not be throwing taxpayer dollars away by re-investigating an already investigated question? (It’s not as if 2016 was 50 years ago). Apparently not, and the answer as to why

might be found in the description of the PI’s study.

The NSF, of course, approved the project, with the work described as, “investigat[ing] the ways that restaurants, groceries, food trucks, etc. *are changing as a result of development pressures...*” **Implicit in that self-description is that the NSF *takes as a pre-supposed truism* that neighborhood development pressures cause food options to change. It seems the NSF didn’t stop to consider that the researcher’s premise is already disproven.**

Hard Science or Sociology?

The PI’s work sounds like a sociological study, doesn’t it? And it would make sense, given she’s doing a sociological study with her NSF grant. **But as it turns out, the NSF Geography and Spatial Sciences Program is funding this study.¹⁰⁵** The discrepancy is understandable, though not explicable, by the fact that the PI – a professor – is housed in her university’s Department of Geography and Earth Sciences.¹⁰⁶ This, despite the researcher’s work **“broadly consider[ing] questions of social justice in urban food systems.”¹⁰⁷**

What any of that has to do with Geography or Earth Sciences is beyond me. And, apparently, it’s somewhat beyond the NSF, too. When my staff asked NSF how this project got funding out of the Geography and Spatial Sciences Program, the agency responded, “Many communities in our country have experienced significant disruptions with some producing ‘food deserts’ where nutritious food cannot be acquired. ... NSF Award #1945132 supports researchers collecting vital data on how the types of challenges described

above are affecting low-income communities. Their empirical focus in this project is on the ways that people can, and cannot, acquire food in urban areas.”¹⁰⁸ **It appears this project’s sole nexus to either Geography or Spatial Sciences, according to NSF itself, is that researchers would “analyze substantial data sources including census data and property data to obtain a spatial model of food supply lines and their relationships to the communities and families that rely on them.”**¹⁰⁹

So, not only do we have a project funded to the tune of a quarter million dollars studying a question that’s already been answered in such a way as to contradict the narrative of this project, the NSF decided to devote money it’s reserved to Geography and Spatial Sciences – hard sciences – to what amounts to a sociological study. The NSF is free to, and does, fund sociological research, though the merits of it doing so are highly debatable. But nobody could disagree that to do it out of a hard sciences program is an egregious error.

THE FESTIVUS REPORT

2020



Military



Wasting Americans' tax dollars, the federal government...

- Spent decades trying unsuccessfully to replace the Bradley (DOD) \$23,900,000,000.00
- Bungled building a drone base in Niger (USAFRICOM and USAF) \$110,000,000.00
- Built unsafe infrastructure in Afghanistan (Army Corps of Engineers) \$4,500,000.00
- Repurposed COVID response funds for unrelated acquisitions (DOD) \$1,000,000,000.00
- Lost equipment designated for Syrians fighting ISIS (DOD) \$715,800,000.00
- Spent millions on STARBASE (DOD) \$35,000,000.00
- Lost drones over Afghanistan (DOD) \$174,000,000.00
- Built a police complex lacking power that is not used (Army Corps of Engineers) \$3,100,000.00

TAXPAYER DOLLARS WASTED: \$25,768,400,000

THE PENTAGON WARS, CONTINUED

***The Department of Defense
has spent \$23,900,000,000.00
and 20 years trying,
unsuccessfully, to replace the
Bradley Fighting Vehicle***



Sometimes, stories about military acquisition are the height of irony. Perhaps no better example exists than the 20-year, \$23.9 billion quest the Department of Defense (DOD) has undertaken, and will continue to undertake, to replace the M-2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle (Bradley).

History of the Bradley Fighting Vehicle

DOD began developing the Bradley before the War in Vietnam, as a replacement for the M113 Armored Personnel Carrier, even as the M113 was “just entering service.”¹ The sole upgrade to the existing M113 was to give seated troops the capability to fire at the enemy from inside the vehicle.²

Over the next twenty years, the DOD continuously changed the requirements, resulting in a “final version of the vehicle [that] was quite different from its original specifications as an armored personnel carrier

that permitted troops to fire from inside.”³ To make a long story short, the Bradley did not begin production or live fire testing, until 16 years after the first requirements were specified.⁴ And, when it began, “the night before the tests, ammunition holds were removed from inside the vehicles and replaced with five-gallon water cans. The Army aimed at the water.”⁵ Ultimately, Congress itself had to mandate truthful live fire testing.⁶

The Pentagon Wars

As one can imagine, an odyssey like this makes for a good story. In 1993, an Air Force officer, James Burton, who was involved with the live fire testing process for the Bradley, wrote a book about it, entitled *The Pentagon Wars: Reformers Challenge the Old Guard*.⁷ In the book, Burton argued, according to reviewers, that “the Pentagon’s spending of the public’s money is a dirty business, one that too often has nothing to do with national defense.”⁸ The book caught fire, and HBO made a movie in 1998.⁹



The movie “The Pentagon Wars” highlighted the insanity of the original Bradley development and testing protocols, portraying DOD poorly. Photo Credit: <https://rb.gy/hhzx2x>

Needless to say, the book and movie did not place the DOD, or the Bradley, in the best light, and the search for a replacement began for the M-2 in 1999.¹⁰

The Bradley Replacement

In 2000, the DOD formally began the Future Combat Systems Program.¹¹ **The program lasted nine years and ate \$21.4 billion before being cancelled due to “overly ambitious requirements, immaturity of key technologies, cost increases, and schedule delays.”¹²**

DOD gave it another go, greenlighting the Ground Combat Vehicle Program in 2010.¹³ **This time, they waited only four years and spent \$1.5 billion before scrapping the effort for “infeasible requirements.”¹⁴**

This brings us to 2020 and the Optionally Manned Fighting Vehicle (OMFV) Program. The OMFV Program began in 2018 with the goal of replacing the M-2 Bradley.¹⁵ In March 2019, the Army issued a request for proposals from defense contractors for a vehicle to replace the M-2.¹⁶ The Army acknowledged its request was “aggressive” and noted that industry “might not be able to meet all requirements.”¹⁷

An understatement if there ever was one.

What exactly did the Army request? According to General Dynamics, the last competitor for the contract to leave after all the other companies had dropped out, its prototype was “too heavy to meet the Army’s requirement,” despite General Dynamics’ defenders saying the vehicles “had to be that heavy ... to meet the Army’s requirement for armor protection.”¹⁸ Not to mention, the timeline in which they wanted the responses was equally unworkable. **According to the Army, in its January 2020 announcement of the cancellation of the OMFV Program,**

“Despite an unprecedented number of industry days and engagements, to include a draft request for proposal over the course of nearly two years -- all of which allowed industry to help shape this competition -- it is clear a combination of requirements and schedule overwhelmed industry’s ability to respond within the Army’s timeline.”¹⁹

Funny enough, this was allegedly exactly what industry told the Army throughout the process. According to *Breaking Defense*, a news outlet, “Industry told the Army the schedule was ‘unobtainium,’ but they elected to proceed anyway.”²⁰ *Breaking Defense’s* industry sources say that **“with more time, industry might have been able to refine the design further to reduce weight, redesign major components to be lighter, or possibly – and this one is a stretch – even invent new stronger, lighter materials. But on the schedule the Army demanded ... reaching the minimum allowable protection without exceeding the maximum allowable weight was physically impossible.”²¹** And so, the Army chose to shutter the OMFV Program.²²

What now?

The Army, correctly, contends “the M-2 [Bradley] is near the end of its useful life and can no longer accommodate the types of upgrades needed for it to be effective on the modern battlefield.”²³ But in its quest to replace the M-2, **DOD has spent \$23.9 billion over twenty years and three separate projects trying to replace the Bradley, and has failed to produce even a workable prototype, never mind a buildable vehicle that can be deployed.**

How? Well, the quest to replace the Bradley seemingly suffers from the same issues the original design and procurement process that the Bradley suffered from in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s: unreasonable and impractical requirements, issues that, when raised by industry respondents, DOD brass have either ignored or disregarded as irrelevant. It remains to be seen whether testers will replace fuel with water during live fire testing this time around... as we haven't even got a prototype to test.

Height of irony, indeed.

UNAUTHORIZED WARS AND UNUATHORIZED WASTE

***U.S. Africa Command and the
U.S. Air Force in Europe-Air
Forces Africa spent
\$110,000,000.00 bungling the
construction of a drone base in
Niger, resulting in alleged
violations of law, safety
concerns for personnel,
mission delays, and more***



Article I, Section 8, Clause 11 of the U.S. Constitution grants Congress the exclusive power to declare war. And Congress has done so, 11 times — first to declare war on Great

Britain in what would come to be known as the War of 1812 and the most recent being World War II.²⁴ Despite leading the country headlong into war, presidents of both parties have avoided going to Congress for formal declarations, instead doing legal gymnastics, as President Truman did in calling American involvement in the Korean War a “police action.”²⁵

Over the last two decades, Presidents Bush, Obama, and Trump have not needed to resort to such acrobatics, instead relying on the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) passed in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks. And that AUMF is the impetus for **U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM)** and the **U.S. Air Force in Europe-Air Forces Africa (USAF-Africa)** spending \$110 million²⁶ on a poorly constructed drone base in Niger resulting in alleged violations of federal law, safety concerns, mission delays, and much more.²⁷

What Does the 2001 AUMF Do, Anyway?

In the wake of the September 11th attacks, President Bush went to Congress and requested authorization for the use of military force so the United States could strike back against the terrorists who perpetrated the September 11th attacks. Congress obliged, authorizing the President to “use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United

States by such nations, organizations or persons.”²⁸



It's hard to believe that when President George W. Bush went before a joint session of Congress in 2001 to ask for the authorization to use military force against those responsible for the September 11th attacks, Congress intended the AUMF to apply in 40 cases across 7 countries over two decades later. Photo Credit: <https://rb.gy/xitpvv>.

Somehow, that one sentence has been used to justify roughly 40 uses of military force in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Niger, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen.²⁹

Nigerien Air Base 201

So what's the AUMF got to do with a drone base in Niger?

In furtherance of this mission, as defined in the 2001 AUMF, USAFRICOM and USAF-Africa built Nigerien Air Base 201 (NAB 201), entirely from scratch, for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) missions.³⁰ It was one of the largest Air Force-led construction projects in American history.³¹

Construction began in October 2013, when USAFRICOM tasked USAF-Africa to construct NAB 201, which was slated to be

completed by October 2016.³² But along the way, “[t]he Air Force and U.S. Africa Command skirted Congressional oversight, didn’t adequately complete a site survey, and didn’t meet safety requirements ... leading to extended delays, cost overruns, and possibly unsafe conditions for personnel.”³³ Ultimately, completion “was delayed by almost 3 years from the original planned date of completion,” with flights not beginning until August 2019.³⁴

Not only was construction delayed, but it came in substantially over budget, as **USAFRICOM “significantly underestimated the project cost, which created risk that the Air Force would not complete the MILCON [meaning military construction] project.”**³⁵ Congress was forced to authorize an additional \$50 million to complete the project, lest the original tens of millions of dollars be totally wasted.³⁶

Antideficiency Act Violations?

And the problems are not limited to the cost. In March 2020, the Office of the Inspector General for the Department of Defense (DOD OIG) alleged potential violations of the Antideficiency Act.³⁷ The Antideficiency Act, of course, “prohibits federal agencies from obligations or expending federal funds in advance or in excess of an appropriation, and from accepting voluntary services.”³⁸ Specifically, DOD OIG alleged the **DOD may have violated the Antideficiency Act in acquiring 12 guard towers using \$3.7 million in procurement funds, rather than MILCON funds, without congressional notification.**³⁹ The cherry on top of the guard tower debacle is in constructing the towers, **USAF-Africa used**

foundations meant for temporary guard towers that could potentially be rendered unusable, given the permanent guard towers required larger foundations.⁴⁰

In a separate incident, DOD OIG also alleged USAF-Africa improperly used appropriated funds without congressional notice when it split a single construction project into 6 separate projects.⁴¹ In general, the USAF is allowed to use operations and maintenance (O&M) funds rather than MILCON funds for new construction when the project is less than \$2 million and will result in a “complete and usable facility.”⁴² **In this case, USAF-Africa presented each of the six projects as creating a complete and usable facility, ostensibly permitting them to use O&M funds instead of MILCON funds, when in reality none of the six fit the requirements for what could be built with O&M funds.**⁴³

What’s Happening Now

Clearly, there were a substantial number of serious questions surrounding the construction of the base, but let’s put those to the side — because not only did USAF-Africa mess up the construction, but also what they ended up building is subpar!

According to the DOD OIG, **“The Air Force did not construct Air Base 201 infrastructure to meet safety, security, and other technical requirements** established in DoD, Air Force, and USAFRICOM directives,” including failing to appropriately construct a perimeter fence.⁴⁴ The DOD OIG also identified problems “relating to the aircraft rescue and firefighting facility, and airfield lights [which] **could lead to increased risk in**

safety and security.”⁴⁵ The DOD OIG also noted the necessary infrastructure to support the base’s operations “has not been completed,” and that “operating without the infrastructure to support ISR increases the safety risk for personnel operating at Air Base 201.”⁴⁶

The Future of NAB 201

Amazingly, yet somehow unsurprisingly, in late December 2019, just 4 short months after American drones began using NAB 201, the *New York Times* reported DOD was considering “abandoning a recently built \$110 million drone base in Niger.”⁴⁷ Don’t get me wrong, it is long past time to end American involvement in endless wars abroad, and President Trump should be applauded for attempting to bring an end to America’s endless wars. But one cannot help but be exasperated at the idea of DOD spending nearly a decade and more than \$100 million on a base, only to turn around and consider abandoning it soon after its completion, 3 years behind schedule.

But of course, we wouldn’t have built the base in Niger in the first place without the 2001 AUMF being overextended. The United States defeated the enemy in Afghanistan. We killed or captured the terrorists who planned, plotted, or aided in the September 11th attacks. We killed their ringleader, Osama bin Laden. We disrupted their terrorist training camps where they plotted and trained, and we dislodged the Taliban government that aided and abetted bin Laden.

Yet after nearly two decades, presidents continue to invoke the 2001 AUMF to justify all sorts of global excursions. It is past time that

Congress acts to repeal the 2001 AUMF and reclaim its constitutional imperative delegated in Article I, Section 8, Clause 11.

IT'S INFRASTRUCTURE WEEK... IN AFGHANISTAN

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers spent \$4,500,000.00 to build a structurally deficient road and a bridge in Afghanistan



I have long called for a fiscally responsible plan to fix the United States' crumbling roads and bridges. In fact, in November of 2019, I introduced S. 2792, my Penny Plan to Enhance Infrastructure Act, that would have provided \$12.3 billion in 2020 for new infrastructure spending, enough to resurface up to nearly 20,000 miles of existing 4-lane roads.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the Senate voted down my proposal. Apparently fixing America's tattered roads and bridges was too tall an ask of the United States Senate. What, however, was not too tall an ask? **Funding the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) as it spent \$4.5 million to build a 4-mile road and a bridge, both rife with structural deficiencies, in Afghanistan.**⁴⁹

That's right! The Corps awarded a \$4.5 million contract to design and build a 4.3-mile paved asphalt road, along with a bridge, to connect the Gurbuz district to Khost City in Khost Province, near the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁵⁰ **The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reviewed the contract and found the bridge, spanning a river, had a handful of structural deficiencies, most notably honeycombing in the bridge's support beams, which could "impact the bridge's structural integrity."**⁵¹ The roadway also had structural deficiencies, including several of the roadway's culverts (which allow water to flow beneath the road) not being maintained.⁵² SIGAR stated that "poor maintenance of these culverts may lead to their deterioration over time, which could shorten the road's useful life and create a safety hazard."⁵³

The State of American Infrastructure

If the Corps felt comfortable gallivanting around the world building roads and bridges, one might think American infrastructure is in a good, or even acceptable, state. But, one would be mistaken. **There are over 54,000 structurally deficient bridges in the U.S.**



The Brent Spence Bridge, connecting Covington to Cincinnati, is in desperate need of rehabilitation. Certainly Americans would be better served by a federal government that took care of domestic infrastructure concerns first.
Photo Credit: <https://rb.gy/te3kid>

that are traveled 174 million times daily.⁵⁴ In Kentucky alone, there are 14,368 bridges, of which 1,016 are structurally deficient.⁵⁵ **For those playing along at home, more than 7% of Kentucky’s bridges are structurally deficient.**⁵⁶

Maybe, instead of the federal government using Americans’ tax dollars to go around the globe and fix the world’s infrastructure, it can use some of that tax revenue at home to fix the thousands upon thousands of structurally deficient roads and bridges we’ve got here in America.

**THE DEFENSE (READ: WASTE)
PRODUCTION ACT**

The Department of Defense repurposed money from a \$1,000,000,000.00 coronavirus response fund for acquisitions ostensibly unrelated to coronavirus



In March 2020, just as the response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was ramping up, the Senate passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. It was a massive, \$2.2 trillion bill aimed at mitigating the economic effects of the mandated lockdowns to stop the spread of

COVID-19. It included massive new spending, like the nearly \$700 billion Paycheck Protection Program, to help small businesses stay tethered to their employees throughout what were supposed to be 15, and then 30-day, lockdowns.

As part of the CARES Act, Congress appropriated “an additional amount for ‘Defense Production Act Purchases,’ [of] \$1,000,000,000, to remain available until expended, to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus, domestically or internationally.”⁵⁷ **It was from this fund, which received roughly \$64 million for 2020 (prior to COVID-19), that the Department of Defense (DOD) paid a litany of contractors for items ostensibly unrelated to COVID-19.**⁵⁸

“COVID-19 Response”

So, what are the sorts of contracts DOD determined would “prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus?” Well, on June 19, 2020, the DOD announced \$187 million “Defense Production Act Title III COVID-19 Actions,” including a **“\$2 Million ... Agreement to Sustain U.S. Domestic Production of Fabric for Army Dress Uniforms.”**⁵⁹ Apparently, acquiring “poly/wool blend fabric for U.S. Army dress uniforms” would help respond to COVID-19!⁶⁰

Never one to be out-done by the Army, a month later the DOD announced a **“\$22 million DPA Title III Agreement with Rolls-Royce” to “expand critical domestic productive capacity for propellers essential to U.S. Navy shipbuilding programs.”**⁶¹

Meanwhile, over the summer, the Air Force also got in on the act when, “as part of the national response to COVID-19, the **Department of Defense entered into a \$55 million agreement with GE Aviation to “sustain essential aircraft engine component capabilities,”** including “the remanufacture of selected ... components used on the F110-100/-129 turbofan jet engine and the F118-101 turbofan jet engine. These engines power the F-16 and the U-2 aircraft respectively.”⁶²

As intimated, the DOD says these agreements with defense contractors often sustain essential production capacities. And it’s not an argument entirely without merit—some of these needs addressed were highlighted in a report delivered in 2018⁶³ in response to Executive Order 13806, “Presidential Executive Order on Assessing and Strengthening the Manufacturing and Defense Industrial Base and Supply Chain Resiliency of the United States.”⁶⁴ **But ultimately, as Bill Greenwalt, of the right-leaning American Enterprise Institute and who was responsible for “defense acquisitions in the George W. Bush administration,”** noted, the CARES money presented “an opportunity for the Department [of Defense] to take what is almost a windfall and use it to try and fill what are some very critical industrial base needs [namely those related to Executive Order 13806] ... but that are only tangentially related to COVID.”⁶⁵

The federal response to COVID-19 was unquestionably robust—we spent upwards of \$4.5 trillion over five separate laws, and as a result, the federal deficit for Fiscal Year 2020 was incredibly high. While one can appreciate

the need for strengthening the domestic manufacturing and military industrial base, using money Congress appropriated specifically for COVID-19 response efforts is not the way to do it.

WANTED: MISSING MATERIEL, LAST SEEN IN NORTHERN SYRIA

***The Department of Defense
potentially lost up to
\$715,800,000.00 in equipment
designated for Syrians fighting
ISIS***



The United States has a bad habit of giving materiel to people unwilling or unable to keep hold of it and worse, it often falls into the hands of bad actors. In a recent case, **the Department of Defense cannot account for \$715,800,000 in military equipment that it was going to give to Syrian forces fighting ISIS after we got our troops out of Syria.**⁶⁶

American Partners: Trusted Stewards of American Materiel? Or Stockpile for Sectarian Groups?

This is hardly the first case of American materiel going missing or being potentially re-appropriated. As ISIS moved across Syria and Iraq in 2014-15, we saw stories of them

capturing newly delivered weapons the U.S. gave Syrian groups fighting ISIS that were just abandoned after mere weeks.⁶⁷ In 2015, “the Popular Mobilisation [sic.] Forces (PMF), an umbrella organisation [sic.] of Iranian-backed Shia militias fighting the Islamic State group, ha[d] acquired M1 Abrams tanks [the U.S. had] given to the Iraqi army. Two PMF militias ... have posted pictures and videos of their fighters alongside M1 Abrams tanks draped with their banners and flags.”⁶⁸

As early as 2013, “well before the extent of the problem had become apparent, the Taliban bragged about taking an American military dog as a prisoner of war.”⁶⁹ Yet somehow, after years upon years of identifying this issue, it still continues to happen.



A U.S.-made M1 Abrams tanks flying the flag of the Kata'ib Sayyid al Shuhada, an Iranian-backed militia, as it operated in Iraq. Photo Credit: <https://rb.gy/xykrss>.

Where did the Materiel Go?

“While empowering allied militaries to confront insurgents on their own has become the cornerstone of the American approach to counterterrorism,” one observer wrote in 2018, “that strategy comes with a drawback: those militaries often lose Western-supplied equipment to American-labeled terrorist organizations.”⁷⁰ **But in this case, the materiel didn’t even make it into the hands of American-backed foreign personnel before being lost, potentially to the**

enemy.⁷¹ As part of the pull-out of American troops from Syria, DOD failed to account for the nearly \$1 billion of equipment it purchased over 2017 and 2018 for the Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund (CTEF) designated for Syria (CTEF-S).⁷²

So, what exactly happened?

In essence, two things led to this remarkably expensive screw up. **First, DOD did not keep a complete list of all equipment purchased and received** and allowed “multiple entities involved with CTEF-S equipment to store records in numerous locations instead of designating a central repository for all supporting accountability documentation.”⁷³ **Second, and even more egregiously, DOD personnel “stored 4,144 Category II weapons (sensitive weapons), such as machine guns and grenade launchers, outside in metal shipping containers and not in a facility that met the requirements for storing Category II weapons.”**⁷⁴

Given that DOD did not create a usable paper trail for each weapon and was physically careless with them, **this led to the entirely predictable result that personnel “could not determine whether items were lost or**



After capturing Mosul, ISIS seized three divisions' worth of materiel from the Iraqi Army. Who's to say whether or not they will move on their next target using the machine guns and rocket launchers DOD is missing? Photo Credit: Stringer, Reuters, <https://rb.gy/bxw6sm>.

stolen.”⁷⁵ The Office of the Inspector General for the Department of Defense (DOD OIG) also bemoaned that any initiation of an investigation will have to be delayed given the lack of “consistent inventories and ensuring proper security for CTEF-S equipment.”⁷⁶

While nearly \$1 billion in materiel doesn’t just get up and walk away, particularly in a war zone, it is impossible to say whether this material was lost or stolen. But either way, this was an entirely avoidable result, as the DOD OIG noted. All DOD had to do was follow their own regulations, and none of this would have happened in the first place.⁷⁷

And what’s more, if President Obama had not placed American forces in between several armies in Syria, with no clear mission, maybe the money would never have been spent in the first place, either.

**GROUND CONTROL TO DOD:
MAJOR WASTE ALERT**

***The Department of Defense
spent \$35,000,000.00 on its
STARBASE program in Fiscal
Year 2020***



Growing up, certain experiences inspire us toward different careers. Maybe you had a

particularly excellent teacher who inspired you to pursue a career in that field or perhaps an episode of *Law & Order* made you think of a career in law.

For decades Uncle Sam has been trying to inspire kids in the so-called STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math) fields. The Department of Defense is no exception, operating numerous advanced and basic STEM programs. But one such program, STARBASE, seems a little lost in the great beyond.

Specifically, DOD is attempting to encourage 5th graders toward interests in STEM topics **by operating a week-long camp-style experience called STARBASE and spending \$35 million in the Fiscal Year 2020 to do it.**⁷⁸

The STARBASE Experience

STARBASE is a DOD program, run by the Secretary of Defense, that for \$35 million annually provides mainly 5th graders from schools across the country with an opportunity to do “hands-on, minds-on” activities in STEM and with a chance to “interact with military personnel to explore careers and observe STEM applications in the ‘real world.’”⁷⁹

Sounds well enough, but what are they actually doing? Manifestly, **STARBASE takes kids out of school for up to 25 hours to do nominally STEM-minded activities, including basic chemical reactions, building rockets similar to those commercially available, and other activities of the sort.**⁸⁰ But the DOD is not in the business of educating kids (who are not the children of military personnel living on bases),

as we have an entirely separate department for that. So, there must be some military interest here, right?⁸¹

A Recruiting Tool, Perhaps?

One might assume DOD was using this program to recruit for Junior ROTC programs, but they're not. **DOD doesn't even keep long-term metrics to see if the program is successful at getting kids excited about the military or STEM.**⁸² They just keep shoveling money at the program. The only success metrics DOD has are surveys taken immediately after the events, which show a marginal increase in receptive attitudes toward the military and to STEM learning.⁸³ Be careful, however, because as everybody knows, argument from anecdote is fallacy!

DOD's analysis is a spot-check, and the agency does no longitudinal analysis to see if the marginal improvements in perception kids see from attending STARBASE have any sort of staying power.

Where Does the Money Go?

Thirty-five million dollars is a LOT of money. Where is the money being spent? **In Fiscal Year 2019, the last year for which there is data, 82 percent of the \$28,219,681 operating budget, or \$23,140,138, went to pay for the salaries of STARBASE personnel.**⁸⁴ Just 10 percent went to supplies and equipment to actually put on the events for the kids.⁸⁵

Federal Efforts on STEM Education

STARBASE is hardly the only program the federal government operates dedicated to STEM education. According to the

Government Accountability Office, there are 163 STEM education programs across the federal government.⁸⁶ In fact, the Secretary of Defense directly oversees four STEM education programs, on top of an additional six dispersed across the Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force.⁸⁷

So, what makes STARBASE so particularly silly? Let's compare it to some of the other DOD, Army, Navy, and Air Force STEM programs. The Secretary of Defense also oversees the Science, Mathematics, And Research for Transformation (SMART) Scholarships, which provides scholarships to people pursuing advanced degrees in STEM fields in high demand for DOD's national defense mission.⁸⁸ In exchange, they are required to accept a job with the DOD, if offered, after graduation.⁸⁹

This has a substantially greater return on investment for the American taxpayer, but it's also a different target demographic. So let's compare DOD programs aimed at the same age group, as well. The Navy's SeaPerch Program provides equipment to teachers to let their students build underwater robots in class.⁹⁰ **Whereas STARBASE has an operating budget of \$35 million, the Navy's SeaPerch Program had an annual operating budget of roughly \$1,800,000, which includes \$709,000 in donations from private and local governments.**⁹¹ Additionally, in contrast to STARBASE, which uses 82% of its operating budget for employee salaries, SeaPerch program employee salaries constitute just 12% of the program's budget.⁹²

The programs, obviously, are not all the same. One would only assume the program with the highest budget would have the biggest return. But this is the federal government—assuming Congress and federal bureaucrats will make sensible spending decisions is a bridge too far.

**100+ AMERICAN-MADE DRONES
ARE OVER AFGHANISTAN (OR
SOMEWHERE ELSE... WE DON'T
REALLY KNOW, TO BE HONEST)**

***The Department of Defense
spent \$174,000,000.00
supplying drones to the Afghan
National Army and then
subsequently lost them***



The United States has been in Afghanistan since 2001 and, for much of the last 15-odd years after dislodging the Taliban, trying to nation-build. Part of any successful nation is an ability to defend its borders, and so we must, the flawed logic goes, help the Afghan National Army (ANA) defend itself. As you might imagine, there have been innumerable speedbumps in pursuit of the goal of building the ANA from scratch.

Most recently, the Department of Defense (DOD) hit another speedbump, when it spent \$174,000,000 on contracts to provide drones to the ANA, drones which the ANA couldn't, and didn't, use enough to make the acquisition cost-effective before DOD and its contractor *literally lost track of the drones.*⁹³

Oftentimes, these speedbumps come in the way of lost or stolen equipment that somehow ends up in the hands of insurgent groups seeking to attack and kill Americans. According to some, as of 2018, “much of the Taliban’s armory comes from American equipment given to the Afghan military and police,” including “lasers and night-vision goggles abandoned by Afghan and American soldiers and bought on the black market, doubling the number of nighttime Taliban attacks and tripling the rate of Afghan casualties between 2014 and 2017.”⁹⁴



Now, DOD and the ANA didn't actually put up missing drone fliers, but believe it or not, they did actually lose more than 100 drones. How? Photo Credit: <https://rb.gy/p2fov7>.

The Structure of the Contracts

So, what exactly happened this time around? In March 2015, the Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A), the name for the American-led coalition organization tasked with building Afghanistan’s capacity to independently handle its internal and external security, recognized that the ANA was unable to conduct intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) operations on their own, without U.S. and coalition forces.⁹⁵ To fix the ANA’s credibility gap, DOD entered into five contracts with a contractor with the goal of having the contractor improve and supplement the ANA’s capabilities, as well as train the ANA to be self-sufficient in ISR operations.⁹⁶ **All told, DOD purchased 16,000 assets from the contractor, including 105 drones.**⁹⁷

Contract Oversight, or Lack Thereof

DOD charged Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) to oversee the five contracts and ensure the contractor fulfilled its end of the bargain.⁹⁸ But, NAVAIR failed to designate individuals to serve as touchpoints between the contractor and DOD both in-



A ScanEagle drone being launched in 2006. ScanEagle systems are hardly cutting-edge technology, but when equipment given to the ANA is at such risk of being “repurposed” by suspected terrorists, that’s all the ANA can be trusted with maintaining. Clearly that distrust is well-founded. Photo Credit: U.S. Air Force, <https://rb.gy/locuh9>.

country and in general, contravening DOD protocols on contract administration, so there was nobody to ensure the contractor fulfilled its responsibility.⁹⁹ Clearly, those touchpoints were necessary, because when the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reviewed the contracts, it found that **NAVAIR was unable to produce evidence that the contractor completed 122 of the 403 deliverables of the entire contract with the contractor, not just the drones for which DOD contracted**, amounting to about 30 percent of unverifiable deliverables.¹⁰⁰

It seems there were some wires crossed about who was responsible for keeping track of the drones, too. But at least there is a recognition of a serious issue. A senior U.S. official told SIGAR that **“U.S. officials have had concerns about a ScanEagle system falling into the wrong hands and potentially becoming weaponized.”**¹⁰¹ This failure of management manifested itself when in October 2019 an Afghan law enforcement agency “seized a stolen ScanEagle vehicle that a criminal intended to sell to a suspected terrorist organization for \$400,000.”¹⁰²

And it’s no surprise these vehicles are at risk of falling into the wrong hands. According to SIGAR, “CSTC-A and NAVAIR said the ANA is responsible for ScanEagle system logistics. **However, the ANA is not tracking the real-time location of ScanEagle equipment across Afghanistan ... [and CSTC-A officials] are concerned that the ANA does not know where the equipment it owns is located or whether it is being used appropriately.**”¹⁰³

In layman's terms? As of late July 2020, "it appears neither DOD nor the ANA can say with certainty where each ScanEagle vehicle is currently located."¹⁰⁴

Less than Flawless Execution

Let's pretend for a second the drones weren't, shall we say... misplaced. Were they a good investment to begin with? Apparently not. SIGAR found the contractor reported 12,413 flight hours, less than one-half the 27,261 flight hours NAVAIR estimated would be necessary to make the contract cost-effective for the American taxpayer.¹⁰⁵ Yet somehow, despite using the drones for less than one-half of the time they thought would be necessary, DOD has spent over \$52 million, nearly twice as much as it cost to buy one of the drones themselves, on "spare parts."¹⁰⁶ But due to substandard oversight of the contracts, the costs are unexplainable.¹⁰⁷

And that's not all. "DOD did not measure and evaluate ScanEagle program performance ... [nor did it] implement performance management guidance required [by DOD protocols.]"¹⁰⁸ It's a good thing for NAVAIR and the ANA – not so much for the American taxpayer – that they neglected to do so. Because NAVAIR fell short in a litany of fundamental ways, including ensuring "(1) inadequate training of ANA soldiers, (2) insufficient manning of ANA ScanEagle operations, (3) insufficient fielding of operational ANA ScanEagle sites, and (4) the ANA's inability to operationalize intelligence obtained through the program."¹⁰⁹ So, even if the ANA had managed to keep hold of the drones, they couldn't have used the intelligence anyway!

It should come as no surprise at this point that SIGAR found "DOD lacks information necessary to track, understand, and improve the return on its \$174 million investment in the program, and is poorly positioned to transfer responsibilities to the ANA," which was the whole point in the first place.¹¹⁰

The cherry on top of this fiasco was that it all could have been avoided. SIGAR made two of the most common-sense recommendations to DOD: follow its protocols and track its assets.¹¹¹

Only in government do those recommendations need to be made, yet here we are.

WARRANTIES, WIRES, AND WASTE, OH MY!

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers spent \$3,100,000.00 on an Afghan National Police women's compound that has no electricity and has never been used



The U.S. government spends approximately \$50 billion a year in Afghanistan. It is no secret that a lot of it is wasted. In this case, the U.S. Army Corps of

Engineers (the Corps) paid \$3,100,000 to build an Afghan National Police (ANP) women's compound that has 192 construction deficiencies and has never been used.¹¹²

Herat Regional Training Center

“On September 21, 2016,” the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction wrote, “the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ... awarded a \$3.1 million firm-fixed-price contract ... to design and build a compound to train 100 female students in the ANP.”¹¹³ The building project mandated building multiple buildings, but **the main building, only three stories, ended up with 192 construction deficiencies, including not being connected to a power source.**¹¹⁴ The nearly 200 construction deficiencies on a relatively small and straightforward building were found over the course of 11 inspections, all of which occurred *after* the Corps deemed the building to be “substantially complete.”¹¹⁵ **These deficiencies did not include any potential issues related to the electrical, mechanical, or plumbing systems because, again, they did not connect the building to a power source.**¹¹⁶

So how does a building end up without power? As it turns out, despite the contractor attempting to rectify its problem by “pull[ing] the cable to the nearest city power junction,” **the ANP itself would not let the contractor link into the city's power supply, because the contractor “never obtained an authorization to do so from ... the Afghan electrical power company.”**¹¹⁷ Rather than hold the contractor accountable for this oversight, the Corps “released [the

contractor] from any further responsibility for the connection.”¹¹⁸

Meanwhile, the building still sits unusable and empty while Uncle Sam is covering the cost of maintenance and rectifying most of the construction deficiencies. Except, the building still lacks power.¹¹⁹

Warranty Issues

You might have noticed, the Corps let the contractor off the hook for the power snafu, despite it being an entirely avoidable issue the contractor caused for itself. If that grinds your gears, don't worry, it gets worse.

The Corps designated the building “substantially complete” on May 28, 2018. Remember, the building still lacks power today and had nearly 200 other deficiencies at that time. This is a problem not only because the building was clearly not substantially complete, but because the designation triggered the beginning of the one-year warranty period the Corps had with the contractor, in accordance with federal regulations.¹²⁰

Nonetheless, the Corps washed their hands of the project, transferred the project to CSTC-A, which in turn subsequently transferred the project to the ANP on August 11, 2018.¹²¹ An incomplete building with no power.

To make matters worse, **the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) notified the Corps of the issues the building had before the warranty period ended in May 2019.**¹²² The Corps said it would enforce the contract, but as of the end of 2019, it had not provided SIGAR with a record of their enforcement

actions against the contractor. That is probably because the Corps does not have a leg to stand on with the contractor in trying to exercise the warranty. They deemed the building “substantially complete” in May 2018, and ignoring SIGAR’s warnings, let the warranty expire a year later.¹²³

It would have been great if, after SIGAR flagged the construction issues, the Corps had pursued the contractor to try to recoup some of the misspent funds. Frankly, the American taxpayer deserves as much. But more troubling than the \$3.1 million is the fact that the Corps allowed this egregious malpractice to occur in the first place!

And the cherry on top of all of this? The ANP is considering plans to train ALL female cadets in Kabul, which would render the entire facility in Herat totally useless.¹²⁴

THE FESTIVUS REPORT

2020



Miscellaneous



Wasting Americans' tax dollars, the federal government...

- Rebuilt a taxiway for airplanes on Nantucket Island (FAA) \$19,999,869.00
- Bought COVID test tubes but received unusable soda bottles (FEMA) \$10,502,997.50
- Bought vehicles for State and local law enforcement agencies (USMS) \$53,900,000.00
- Built 3 bicycle storage facilities at D.C. Metro stations (Metro) \$5,966,180.00
- Prepared bugs for you to eat (NSF and DARPA) \$2,819,702.02
- Sprayed alcoholic rats with bobcat urine (NIH and VA) \$4,575,431.00
- Allowed States to take advantage of TANF rules (Congress) \$16,500,000,000.00
- Overspent on pre-fab housing and water pumps in Texas (FEMA) \$182,000,000.00

TAXPAYER DOLLARS WASTED: \$16,779,764,179.50

A TAXIWAY FOR THE ÜBER-RICH AND THEIR PRIVATE JETS

***The Federal Aviation
Administration spent
\$19,999,869.00 rebuilding a
taxiway for airplanes on
Nantucket Island, a posh summer
vacation destination for
America's rich and famous***



Americans spent a large portion of 2020 in their homes, sometimes prohibited from having gatherings lest the local government shut off their power.¹ It's only natural that people would be eager to go on vacation. Now, for those privileged few who fly into and out of Nantucket Island, they'll have a brand spanking new taxiway to use when they do, courtesy of **the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)** which spent **\$19,999,869** to construct a taxiway at **Nantucket Memorial Airport (ACK)**,² an airport frequented most often by private jets.³

Nantucket is a very popular destination for vacation, but most people who spend a week there after saving up to splurge on a vacation opt to get there by sea. There are several affordable ferries that take passengers

over sea to the island, all for manageable prices.⁴ But wouldn't it be easier for recognizable figures like former Secretary of State John Kerry and his wife, Teresa Heinz (heiress of the Heinz Corporation—yes, that Heinz), who owned a “waterfront property,” a “five-bedroom, 5,600 square foot ... home overlook[ing] Nantucket Harbor on just over three-quarters of an acre,” on the island that sold for \$17.5 million in 2018,⁵ to fly in, and avoid the hassle of the 2-plus hour ferry ride⁶ all together? While it's impossible to say, without looking at flight logs, whether particular celebrities or fabulously wealthy executives flew private into ACK, according to the airport, **for the period of June 2019 through May 2020, 52% of flights into and out of ACK were private flights with tickets not made available to the general public.**⁷ It should be noted that not all of the 52% were private jets. “Private flights,” according to the airport, “include owner-operated light sport aircraft, flight school activity, [along with] private charters, and corporate aviation.”⁸

In order to spend such an exorbitant amount of money for a taxiway at an airport that's used majority by private jets, one might assume the airport is well-trafficked, right? At



There can be no question that sunsets on Nantucket are gorgeous. But the logic the FAA used in spending \$20 million on a 6,000 foot taxiway at a majority private flight airport? That's, without a doubt, up for debate. Photo Credit: Adobe.

least if millions of travelers are passing through the airport, the millions who are not private jet owners would get to use it? Nope! ACK is a small, regional airport. The bulk of its business is, as is the case with most popular summer vacation destinations, seasonal. **From May to September 2019, the airport saw 104,581 enplanements, or individuals boarding aircrafts.⁹ But from October to April, ACK had just 23,152 enplanements.¹⁰** The largest carrier to ACK only flies from July through October.¹¹ Meanwhile, **the largest year-round carrier, CapeAir (as in Cape Cod, Massachusetts) has a fleet of airplanes, the largest of which carries anywhere from 10-14 seats.¹²** CapeAir carries an average of 4 passengers to ACK per trip.¹³

It's an idyllic summer getaway, located 30 miles away from the Massachusetts coastline.¹⁴ It's gorgeous, there can be no denying that. But if you want to own property on Nantucket Island, you simply must be wealthy beyond wealthy. **The median property value on the island is nearly \$1 million.¹⁵** That might explain why it has long been the summer play-place of America's rich and famous. **In fact, the population of the island roughly quintuples during July and August, when**



This 5.23 acre property with a "beachfront compound," deemed "bulldozer bait," comes with a private beach, and can be yours for the low, low price of \$15 million. That's \$15 million for a fixer-upper property. Clearly, owning property on Nantucket Island is an accessible aspiration for the average American... Photo Credit: <https://rb.gy/wcljau>.

the year-round population of roughly 11,000 balloons to "around 50,000 or more."¹⁶

Exactly what types of people are accounting for that increase? Well, **celebrities including Meryl Streep, Ben Stiller, Woody Allen, James Franco, Kourtney Kardashian, Kathie Lee Gifford, and Kevin Spacey have all "been spotted on the island, which has traditionally been short on celebs but long on CEOs, Wall Street-ers, political heavyweights and other motley moneybags."¹⁷** Other notables who own or have owned houses on Nantucket Island include Eric Schmidt, (former CEO of Google and executive chairman of Google's parent company, Alphabet), Jack Welch (CEO, General Electric), Louis Gerstner (CEO, IBM), Bob Wright (CEO, NBC Universal), Mike Tyson, and Roger Penske (Owner, Penske Corporation and Penske Racing), among many, many, others.¹⁸

So, the FAA built a taxiway at a majority private flight airport likely used predominantly by the rich and famous. Pretty egregious, but why's this been given five pigs – the worst of the worst of waste – you ask? Well, believe it or not, **some of the money that funded this was included in the mega spending bill Congress passed in March, the CARES Act, which was meant to respond to coronavirus.** In fact, Congress appropriated an additional \$10 billion for the Airport Infrastructure Program to, get this, "prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus."¹⁹ Specifically, nearly \$2 million of the nearly \$20 million bankrolling the project is "CARES Act funding."²⁰

It's anybody's guess how building a taxiway at an airport for America's rich and

famous helps prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.

SODA-MN WASTEFUL

The Federal Emergency Management Agency spent \$10,502,997.50 for test tubes and swabs for coronavirus tests, but received unusable soda bottles



In the spring and summer, President Trump successfully marshalled the resources of the federal government to provide those responding to coronavirus with an unprecedented amount of supplies. But along the way, perhaps in its haste, the federal government put American taxpayers on the hook for questionable contracts with questionable characters, which received questionable results. In the spring, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) entered into two contracts with Fillakit, LLC in quick succession. Ultimately, **FEMA paid \$10,502,997.50 for test tubes and swabs for coronavirus tests,**²¹ but Fillakit ended up providing, effectively, mini soda bottles.²²

They're not Soda Bottles, but they are also not not Soda Bottles

Now rest assured, Fillakit did not go out to the local supermarket, buy cases of soda,

dump the soda, and repurpose the bottles as test tubes... but that would've been just about as useful as what they did do. According to first-hand observers and former employees, Fillakit tried to pass off “plastic tubes made for bottling soda,” to FEMA which, of course, quickly shipped Fillakit's deliveries along to all 50 states.²³ “Officials in New York, New Jersey, Texas and New Mexico confirmed [to reporters] they can't use the Fillakit tubes.”²⁴ It's no wonder, when you learn how they were made.

State officials who received the “tubes” said that **Fillakit used preforms instead, as in pre-formed soda bottles which are tubes “designed to be expanded with heat and pressure into 2-liter soda bottles.”**²⁵ Even the owner of Fillakit “acknowledged that the tubes are normally used for soda bottles.”²⁶ Hmmm.

And that's not all. The tubes were supposed to have at least two milliliters of solution in each tube, but “sometimes there were tubes that didn't have any [solution] in there.”²⁷

To make matters worse, according to the sources observing Fillakit's operations, the process for making the tubes was beyond unsterile. “Workers shoveled up the tubes from unsanitary surfaces” using “snow shovels.”²⁸ According to one former employee, “it wasn't even clean, let alone sterile,” and standards were compromised in the rush to meet the productivity goals.²⁹ **But in the end, the sterility of the tubes was irrelevant because even if they were sterile, “they are an unusual shape so they don't fit racks.”**³⁰ My staff spoke with the Department of Health for New Jersey, and months after

receiving the test tubes, the Department is “still trying to identify a use” for the tubes because they were “too large to fit in the racks.”³¹

That’s right! Not only are the tubes allegedly unsterile, they didn’t even fit into test tube racks!

My staff reached out to FEMA to inquire if there were any problems with the swabs, to which **FEMA responded that “we are deferring to DHS OIG” on “all questions concerning the contracts with Fillakit,” including issues reported to FEMA by recipients of the swabs and tubes.**³² Clearly, something’s gone wrong at FEMA if it is unwilling to answer a single question about these contracts.

The Swabs Were Unusable, Too

Fillakit not only managed to drop the ball on the tubes, they also failed to provide usable swabs. According to the New Jersey Department of Health, it “received a significant quantity of bulk wrapped (as opposed to individually wrapped) swabs, which created significant logistical challenges with respect to the sterility of the swab.”³³

Fillakit’s Record

Maybe FEMA’s refusal to comment has something to do with Fillakit’s record. Believe it or not, **Fillakit, LLC. was formed just six days before receiving the contract to produce the test tubes.**³⁴ And if that’s not enough of a red flag, the head of **Fillakit was “an ex-telemarketer repeatedly accused of fraudulent practices over the past two decades.”**³⁵ Now there’s something to be said for second chances, but when a company was formed last week by somebody repeatedly accused of fraud over a matter of decades, it



Fillakit provided allegedly unusable test tubes to FEMA, at a cost of \$10.5 million! Photo Credit: New Mexico Department of Health and ProPublica, <https://rb.gv/vvija>.

might be a reason for caution. **By the way, over the summer, “Fillakit notified the Florida Secretary of State it dissolved on June 26.”**³⁶

Thankfully, FEMA will have to explain itself for its poor stewardship of Americans’ tax dollars sooner or later, because, on June 18, the Office of the Inspector General for the Department of Homeland Security opened an investigation into the allegations Fillakit provided contaminated testing kits and failed to provide its employees with adequate personal protective equipment to ensure the kits were sterile.³⁷

According to some, “FEMA has the power to claw back money paid to contractors, [and] remove them from the government’s list of approved vendors.”³⁸ While there is no

timeline yet for the completion of the Inspector General’s investigation, or what sanction may be appropriate, rest assured I will keep an eye on their progress on this case and work to ensure FEMA claws back as much of the wasted \$10.5 million as possible from the former CEO, given he’s dissolved his company in the wake of the scandal.

THIS POLICY’S A LEMON

***The U.S. Marshals Service
improperly spent \$53,900,000.00
on vehicles for State and local
law enforcement agencies***



Sometimes federal law enforcement agencies partner with state and local law enforcement for general information sharing purposes, and other times they are established for particular purposes. For example, in July 2020, former Attorney General William Barr launched Operation Legend, a “law enforcement initiative across all federal law enforcement agencies working in conjunction with state and local law enforcement officials to fight the sudden surge of violent crime.”³⁹

The U.S. Marshals Service (USMS) often participates in these sorts of partnerships. As part of these partnerships, USMS uses Joint Law Enforcement Operations (JLEO) funds to reimburse costs state and local partners

incur during joint law enforcement operations with USMS.⁴⁰ But up until Fiscal Year 2017, USMS would buy vehicles for state and local partners, and it “immediately titled the vehicles to participating state or local law enforcement agencies.”⁴¹

As you may imagine, buying vehicles for other agencies creates the possibility of problems and in fact, the Office of the Inspector General for the Department of Justice (DOJ OIG) found that over the course of Fiscal Years 2012 through 2016, **USMS bought \$53,900,000 worth of vehicles for state and local partners but has lost track of a substantial proportion.**⁴²

The story begins in 1997, when the Assistant Attorney General for Administration published a “guidance” for the Department of Justice’s constituent agencies regarding allowable JLEO costs for the Department to incur as part of joint task forces.⁴³ The 1997 guidance allowed the creation of a cost-sharing relationship under which DOJ agencies are now required to operate.⁴⁴ Specifically, the cost-sharing relationship permitted USMS to purchase vehicles directly, but “required that such vehicles remain in use for joint operations so long as needed” by the task force.⁴⁵ **But, USMS subsequently signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with local law enforcement permitting state and local law enforcement to keep the vehicles USMS purchased for them even after they withdrew from a task force.**⁴⁶

Buyer Beware

So, how many vehicles are we talking about, exactly? **According to the DOJ OIG, from FY12-16, USMS purchased 1,609 vehicles with JLEO funds for \$53.9 million,**

for an average cost of \$33,499 per unit.⁴⁷ When the DOJ OIG conducted its initial review in January 2017, it found that USMS was able to confirm 656 vehicles were still in task force service.⁴⁸ **However, by February 2019, USMS was unable to confirm whether they were still in use.**⁴⁹

So, what about the rest of the 1,609 vehicles – 953 to be exact – USMS bought and titled that it could not locate in January 2017? **Those vehicles are still MIA, and USMS couldn't even say whether their state and local partners had placed the vehicles into non-task force operations, or sold them entirely.**⁵⁰

Why is this a problem? According to the DOJ OIG, “The vehicles of the withdrawing agencies should have been returned to the USMS for disposition or use by agencies that continued with task force operations. **Consequently, all 1,609 vehicles purchased through FYs 2012 through 2016 should have remained available for use on other task force operations or disposition by the USMS.**”⁵¹

But there is a happy(ish) ending, believe it or not. In 2017, the Asset Forfeiture Management Staff at DOJ told USMS it was not permitted to allow state and locals to keep the vehicles.⁵² While USMS initially balked at the instruction, claiming the 1997 guidance allowed it to do so, it eventually saw the light, discontinuing the practice in Fiscal Year 2017.⁵³ Now, USMS leases out vehicles from the General Services Administration, turning off the flow of free vehicles.⁵⁴

Still, this is another case of an entirely avoidable waste of Americans' tax dollars. If a business bought supplies for another business

with which it is partnering, without requiring the receiving business only use the supplies in furtherance of the purchaser's business, the purchaser would go out of business as quick as you could snap your fingers. Is it any wonder the federal government has a \$27 trillion debt when agencies make stupid decisions like these?

D.C. METRO TAKES THE TAXPAYERS FOR A RIDE... AGAIN

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority spent \$5,966,180.00 to build three bicycle storage facilities at Washington, D.C., area Metro stations



Last year, I criticized the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (Metro), charged with running D.C.'s public transit, arguing the federal government should shut the tap off and stop giving them their annual stipend, which in Fiscal Year 2020 was \$153 million. This year, in Fiscal Year 2021, they'll receive close to \$500 million.⁵⁵ I recounted horror stories of Metro's incomprehensible mismanagement, and incapacity to fix easy problems, all resulting in millions flushed down the toilet (in some cases a literal toilet, which cost nearly \$500,000).⁵⁶

Among the cases of incompetence, I highlighted was an effort to build a bike storage facility at the East Falls Church Metro Station. Last year, we only knew that the project had gone on far longer, years longer in fact, than expected. When I reached out to the Metro Office of the Inspector General (OIG), they indicated that they would look into the matter, and they ultimately opened a formal investigation. The OIG finally released its report, and the result is worse than I expected.

It turns out Metro’s work at East Falls Church was part of a larger “Bike and Ride” project, which sought to construct three bicycle storage facilities with a total of 270 available storage spaces,⁵⁷ has cost Metro \$5,966,180, and lasted nine years.⁵⁸



This is the East Falls Church Bike and Ride facility. It offers 52 spaces for daily bicycle storage. The EFC Bike and Ride cost an estimated \$1.9 million to date. Photo Source: <https://rb.gv/92s7zb>.

You didn’t misread—Metro actually spent more than \$22,000 per space on a project that took nearly a decade, and all they got was a total of 270 bike spots!⁵⁹

To put such egregious waste into perspective, the average taxpayer pays roughly \$10,000 per year in taxes.⁶⁰ **That means the taxes of two Americans went to building each individual bike spot.** This is the organization your Congress thinks is worth

\$500 million this year. It seems to me that Metro is taking the taxpayers for a ride!

Metro’s project consisted, in part, of building three bicycle parking facilities at “College Park (CP), East Falls Church (EFC), and Vienna Metro Stations.”⁶¹ They began construction at College Park in 2011, and the project finished in 2012.⁶² It was expected that construction on the East Falls Church and Vienna Stations would start and end in 2015.⁶³ **The original three contracts for these facilities were awarded to a single contractor, at a total cost of \$1,803,312.**⁶⁴ That’s about \$6,678 per spot—not great either. But then, the project went really off the rails.

While the College Park Bike and Ride facility was completed on time, the OIG found numerous problems arose in the construction of the EFC and Vienna Station facilities.⁶⁵ Construction on the two facilities began in February of 2015, but due to various construction and payment issues, the contracts for the EFC and Vienna Station facilities were terminated in 2016.⁶⁶ **To make matters worse, because of Metro’s failure to keep records, it is impossible to know “the amount that [Metro] had agreed to pay for the incomplete work.”**⁶⁷ Metro then awarded two new contracts to a different contractor to complete the EFC and Vienna Station facilities.⁶⁸ This time the contracts totaled \$2,447,000.⁶⁹

While I would love to tell you that the two facilities were completed and everyone lived happily ever after, this is a D.C. Metro-run project — you’d know that would be a lie. In a Financial Management Review report issued by the Federal Transit Administration, it was reported that there were “significant

deficiencies” in Metro’s procedures for awarding and overseeing contracts.⁷⁰ In fact, observers criticized Metro’s procedures, “cit[ing] a lack of written procedures to determine if a JOC [Job Order Contract] contractor has the requisite expertise to undertake the job and inadequate justification for awarding a JOC contract instead of pursuing a competitive procurement.”⁷¹

In other words, Metro gave a job to a company without checking if they could do it or seeing if other companies could do it better. Unsurprisingly, after awarding the contract in that manner, coupled with a lack of rigorous oversight, the expected completion date for the two facilities kept getting moved back, all the while driving up the construction costs.⁷²

That brings us to today. The EFC and Vienna Station Bike and Ride facilities opened in the fall of 2020, five years behind schedule and millions of dollars over budget. I’d be willing to bet that if Americans learned their tax dollars were going toward \$20,000 bike spots, they’d have some choice words for Metro.

Meanwhile, on December 1, 2020, Metro announced a substantial cutback in service, including closing the East Falls Church and College Park stations, along with 17 other locations.⁷³ **This means that after spending literally millions of dollars and nearly a decade building these facilities at these Metro stations, with the goal of improving access to the Metro system for those living near those stations, Metro has turned around and decided to shut down the stations, closing off access entirely.** While much seems to be changing at Metro, **one thing that won’t be changing until at least**

2022 is that Metro hierarchy will be getting their raises this year.⁷⁴

Metro is the only public transit system that receives a dedicated federal subsidy, and it shows. It is long past time for Congress to recognize Metro’s incompetence and stop wasting our constituents’ hard-earned tax dollars propping up a failing public transit system most Americans will never even use.

SLIMY, YET SATISFYING?

Researchers spent funds from grants from the National Science Foundation and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency worth \$2,819,702.02 to prepare bugs for you to eat



Malthusianism is the concept that human population growth, and the demand it creates, will outstrip the supply of a given commodity of a fixed supply. For most people, the idea fell out of fashion when Norman Borlaug created a new type of wheat, for which he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970.⁷⁵ But for some, half a century’s worth of evidence is insufficient to dissuade them from Malthusianism. So now, **researchers used grant funds, \$2,819,702.02 to be exact, from the National Science Foundation (NSF)**

and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to prepare mealworms for human and livestock consumption.⁷⁶

Yellow mealworms – all mealworms really – are gross. The yellow ones, the kind the research team was working with, are the larval stage of darkling beetles.⁷⁷ Specifically, **the research team, which, funny enough, included academics and a company that separately had received \$1.3 million from the NSF to subsidize its research and development as it attempts to turn mealworms into protein feed for livestock,**⁷⁸ assembled the genome of the yellow mealworm to “inform research efforts and to provide resources to optimise [sic.] yellow mealworm for mass production and consumption.”⁷⁹



As Timon and Pumbaa from Disney's *The Lion King* tried to get a lion to eat bugs – not an animal that should be doing so – similarly, researchers are using your tax dollars to try and convince you to chow down on some insects. Photo Credit: The Walt Disney Company, <https://rb.gy/8b2au5>.

Now you might be thinking, “They’re just prepping these yellow mealworms for consumption as part of livestock feed, what’s the problem with that?” And maybe that’s exactly what the company that literally just turns yellow mealworms into livestock feed are doing; but the research, to the research team, had far wider implications...

“Global food demands,” they wrote, “are rising at an alarming rate, and the lack of reliable, sustainable protein sources are an emerging food security issue across the world. ... Thus, alternatives to traditional protein production are a necessity. **One such alternative is the use of mass-produced insects for food and animal feed.**”⁸⁰ In fact, researchers must be excited at the prospect of millions of Americans eating mealworms for protein, claiming “the yellow mealworm, the larval stage of the darkling beetle *Tenebrio molitor*, shows great promise as an alternative source of animal protein.”⁸¹

But while there are some who opt to eat bugs, most Americans would, you know... not do that. Advocates of bug eating say it “packs a lot of protein.”⁸² According to researchers, yellow mealworms contain approximately “20% protein.”⁸³ What else contains protein, for those opting to avoid traditional animal meat? Plant-based meat, soy, and a million other sources of protein that would be more appetizing to me than *literally eating bugs*.



Which would you prefer, cocktail shrimp covered in ants, or a plant-based “burger” substitute. For me, I’d take the latter every time. Photo Credits: The Washington Post, <https://rb.gy/qjqqqs>.

In fact, one brand of plant-based “meat” has 19 grams of protein per serving,⁸⁴ more than half the recommended daily intake.⁸⁵

But merits of eating bugs versus plant-based “meat” is of secondary importance because the fact of the matter is we aren’t going to run out of food. Malthusian nightmares were shown to be just that – nightmares – fifty years ago.

TRAUMATIZING DRUNK RATS

Researchers used grants from the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Veterans Affairs worth \$4,575,431.00 to spray alcoholic rats with bobcat urine



Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is no laughing matter. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), anywhere from 11 to 20 percent of veterans of the Iraq War, the Gulf War, and the Vietnam War have PTSD.⁸⁶ What is, however, a laughing matter, is a study researchers performed using money from grants worth **\$4,575,431⁸⁷** from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the VA to get rats addicted to alcohol and then to spray them with bobcat urine.⁸⁸

Now, the researchers will tell you they were studying the connection between veterans suffering from alcoholism and PTSD, and how sex impacted these ailments. But, manifestly, they were studying three things: (1) “how male and female rats respond to bobcat urine” (a predator’s odor), (2) whether stress responsiveness to a predator’s odor changes following voluntary alcohol consumption, and (3) whether sex differences have an effect on the reaction.⁸⁹

One can only wonder how they went about finding rats that had voluntarily engaged in alcohol consumption. Must have been a tough group to target in the general population...

In all seriousness, here’s exactly what the researchers did, in layman’s terms. **They spent five weeks giving rats “intermittent” access to alcohol to get them hooked.⁹⁰** Then, they put the rats in a cage, and ***literally sprayed them with bobcat urine, a predator’s odor, to simulate trauma.⁹¹*** Then, they tested whether males and females responded differently.⁹²

In theory, the study was supposed to simulate the effects of alcoholism on how individuals react to trauma. And ultimately, researchers found substantial differences between male and female rats’ responses to bobcat urine, and that both male and female rats that had been drinking showed increased stress compared to their sober brethren. But for those of you following along, you might have noticed one fundamental design flaw: the order of traumas.

The research was supposed to simulate a veteran with PTSD returning from a tour of duty, becoming an alcoholic, and then how

their alcoholism impacts their PTSD. But in this case, they flipped the order. The appropriate analogy is not the all-too-familiar story I just outlined. Rather, **researchers' study design could most appropriately be analogized to studying how pre-existing alcoholics deployed onto battlefields would respond to trauma they encounter overseas.**

I'm all for working towards solutions for alcoholism, and PTSD, particularly for our veterans. But we need to do work that actually solves the problem and replicates the issue. Otherwise, there won't ever be any progress toward solving the problem that must be solved.

THE TANF DOUBLE-DIP

States are spending a small portion of the \$16,500,000.00 Congress allocates to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program on TANF-related activities



The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program “provides grant funds to states and territories to provide needy families with financial assistance and related support services. State-administered programs

may include childcare assistance, job preparation, and work assistance.”⁹³ Only, instead of actually spending the money, a recent study found that **states are not using TANF money for TANF-related purposes, but instead are using the \$16,500,000,000 program as a piggy bank.**⁹⁴

So, Where's the Money Going?

On what exactly are the states spending their TANF money, then, if not on childcare assistance, job preparation, and work assistance? Well, **\$1.1 million of the State of Mississippi's TANF funds somehow allegedly were paid to Brett Favre (yes, that Brett Favre).**⁹⁵ Rest assured, the NFL's former league all-time leader in passing yards, passing touchdowns, and quarterback wins is not to blame, nor did he keep the money.⁹⁶ In fact, the State of Mississippi had “seen no records indicating Mr. Favre knew that TANF was the program that served as the source of the money he was paid.”⁹⁷ But this raises the question, how did the Hall of Fame quarterback get wrapped up in a TANF controversy in the first place?

According to research, “Some states are playing a paper game in which they're claiming to meet their own TANF funding obligations by counting donations, services and volunteer hours by nonprofits such as food banks and Boys and Girls Clubs.”⁹⁸ In Mr. Favre's case, he came by the \$1.1 million “through the Department of Human Services and a nonprofit, the Mississippi Community Education Center, or MCEC ... [the latter of which, according to a state audit] paid Favre's company, Favre Enterprises, \$1.1 million for appearances,

promotions, autographs and speaking engagements.”⁹⁹ Sound familiar?



Brett Favre is the proud owner of 71,838 NFL passing yards and 508 touchdowns. He was also, for a time, allegedly in possession of \$1.1 million in TANF funds from a Mississippi nonprofit. Photo Credit: <https://rb.gy/ds9xej>.

It’s not just high-profile athletes either. States have begun using TANF money to subsidize other state agencies.¹⁰⁰ States are required to show a “maintenance of effort” under which states “must continue to spend at least 75 percent of the amount that they did prior to welfare reform (in 1994) on programs serving low-income families.”¹⁰¹ **But in Louisiana, “almost all the \$63 million counted as maintenance of effort is money already being spent by agencies such as the [state’s] departments of education and corrections.”**¹⁰² According to Jan Moller, executive director of the Louisiana Budget Project, “When Louisiana started having a budget crisis, TANF became a piggy bank that ended up diverting money from the core original goals of welfare reform.”¹⁰³

But it’s not just Louisiana. “Many states are using TANF dollars for programs unrelated to work activities, from child welfare to drug

courts. Often, those programs already are being paid for by other state agencies, and officials simply count those costs as TANF spending.”¹⁰⁴ **In Michigan, \$103 million in TANF money in just 2018 alone was spent \$103 million on college scholarship programs, sometimes “available to students from middle-class and more affluent families.”**¹⁰⁵ According to the Michigan State Budget Office, “the scholarship issue has been ongoing” for at least 10 years.¹⁰⁶

How bad is the problem? Well, on average, states are spending just 14 percent on childcare assistance. They are spending 11 percent on work-related activities, which include job education and training.¹⁰⁷ Seventeen states are spending less than 5 percent on these core program goals.¹⁰⁸ Some observers chastised states for “radically abus[ing] the program... **Almost every state government has failed to carry out the principal objectives. Promoting work is the key idea of the act, and they do virtually nothing** – both red states and blue states.”¹⁰⁹

And the results speak for themselves. **Just a quarter of TANF cases close because clients find jobs.**¹¹⁰ Most are closed for failure to comply with requirements, among other reasons.¹¹¹

How is this allowed to happen? Take the Michigan example, \$103 million on college scholarships available to students from middle-class and affluent families. This is hardly the intended audience of TANF funds. When asked what in the world they were thinking, a spokesman for the Michigan State Budget Office said “We were in a pickle during the Great Recession. **The spirit of the TANF**

dollars was not meant for this purpose ... but we talked to the feds and we knew it was allowable. So we went ahead and did it because we didn't have the general fund dollars.”¹¹²



If a state wants to use its' residents tax dollars on college scholarships for students from middle-class and affluent families that is its decision. What it shouldn't do, is use TANF money meant for basic welfare. Photo Credit: Adobe.

When asked if the State of Michigan would cut off the tap, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer's spokesman indicated there were plans to phase out the TANF spending on college scholarships in the 2020-21 fiscal year budget, "but now that COVID has hit, who knows how the budget is going to shake out."¹¹³ **Apropos of nothing, Michigan ranks among the "biggest four-year funders of Planned Parenthood," clocking in at a whopping \$21.5 million in state funds devoted to the abortion provider.**¹¹⁴

Far be it from me to say anything about how Michigan operates its budget, but maybe if it didn't spend \$21.5 million on an abortion provider, it wouldn't have to dip into TANF funds inappropriately.

DISASTER ZONES... IN TEXAS AND IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency spent \$182,000,000.00 on excess pre-fabricated housing units and home water pumps in Texas after Hurricane Harvey



When a natural disaster strikes, Federal, state, and local governments jump into action to attempt to mitigate the damage and help Americans rebuild their lives. Often, this comes with an additional appropriation in Congress. In 2017, Congress took a similar course, appropriating \$31.5 billion to respond to Hurricanes Harvey and Maria.¹¹⁵ Often, in the rush to respond, we learn months and years later that FEMA and other federal agencies wasted millions of dollars unnecessarily. Unfortunately, this pattern holds true in Texas, where the Office of the Inspector General for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS OIG) determined **the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) spent \$182 million on excess manufactured housing units (MHUs) and tank pump systems (TPSS) they didn't need.**¹¹⁶

Ultimately, they ended up with 2,596 excess pre-fab housing units and 2,367 excess TPSs.¹¹⁷

Hurricane Harvey and FEMA's Response

In late August 2017, Hurricane Harvey tore through the Caribbean and the Gulf Coast, sadly claiming the lives of nearly 70 people while causing widespread property damage costing roughly \$125 billion along the way.¹¹⁸ As is its directive, FEMA leapt into action.

But sometimes, in the rush to respond, things get missed. If you were to hire an Average Joe, tell him there's a massive hurricane that's just hit large swaths of Texas, and ask him what to do, he may very well decide to back a dump-truck full of cash up to the situation and shovel it as fast as he can. But FEMA is designed to prepare for these situations and has implemented protocols that, in theory, prevent that from happening.

In assessing housing needs following a natural disaster, FEMA is required to perform three "direct housing assessments."¹¹⁹ There is the initial assessment, determining "whether to implement a Direct Housing Mission," a subsequent assessment, which "provides a more 'in-depth' housing assessment ... result[ing] in a recommendation to implement an MHU mission or other housing mission for displaced disaster survivors," followed, lastly, by the production of a direct housing mission report, assessing and identifying "the operational requirements for providing the recommended forms of direct housing."¹²⁰

As part of that process, the Recovery and Analytics Division (RAD) and the Logistics Management Directorate (LMD) within

FEMA are supposed to coordinate to come up with a projection for the number of MHUs and TPSs FEMA will need. Simple enough, right?

Only this time, the Recovery and Analytics Division and the Logistics Management Directorate failed to coordinate, with disastrous (no pun intended) effects.¹²¹ According to the DHS OIG, "RAD initially projected 4,000 MHUs would be needed in the wake of Hurricane Harvey. ... However, according to FEMA LMD personnel, they increased housing projections in September 2017 from 4,000 to 8,500 without coordinating with either RAD or IA [FEMA's Individual Assistance division] personnel."¹²² Even worse, "**LMD ordered the MHUs before IA personnel responsible for managing the survivor application process could determine the number of MHUs needed and communicate that information to LMD.**"¹²³ Now, nobody is expecting LMD to wait around for people to show up at FEMA's doorstep looking for housing before beginning to buy. But to use, among other metrics, "historical trends" to make a prediction more than twice the initial estimation should have raised red flags along the way.¹²⁴

But not only were FEMA components unable to coordinate amongst themselves, they couldn't keep track of which other entities they were working with, and what that would do to the number of MHUs FEMA needed to buy. At the end of September, FEMA began contracting with the State of Texas, which "allowed the State to provide temporary housing directly to survivors, thereby reducing the number of MHUs FEMA would need to assist Hurricane Harvey survivors."¹²⁵ Seems reasonable enough, only **FEMA "did not have a policy in place to monitor inventory**

and did not have visibility of the State's purchases. As such, FEMA continued sending MHUs to Texas staging areas even after Texas' GLO [General Land Office, responsible for disaster recovery] began providing MHUs and travel trailers to survivors.”¹²⁶

Meanwhile, while FEMA is permitted to use both new and reused MHUs, **“FEMA's policies do not promote MHU reuse and do not provide specific criteria determining whether to sell or reuse MHUs.”¹²⁷**

In essence, FEMA was throwing MHUs and TPSs at the issue. No wonder they ended up spending nearly \$200 million on 2,596 MHUs and 2,367 TPSs, respectively!

The Definition of Insanity

You have probably heard the oft-misattributed Einstein saying, “The definition of insanity is doing something repeatedly and expecting a different result,” but it really does apply to a T here. **Since 2006, the DHS OIG has issued no fewer than seven reports identifying fundamental weaknesses in FEMA's manufactured housing program.**¹²⁸ Yet time and again, after natural disasters like these, we see fiscal disasters follow.

It would be understandable if Average Joe were the one making these decisions, but if your entire job is to respond to emergencies, “it was an emergency, and we were in a rush” is hardly an excuse.

And now...



On to the Feats of
Strength!

Citations

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