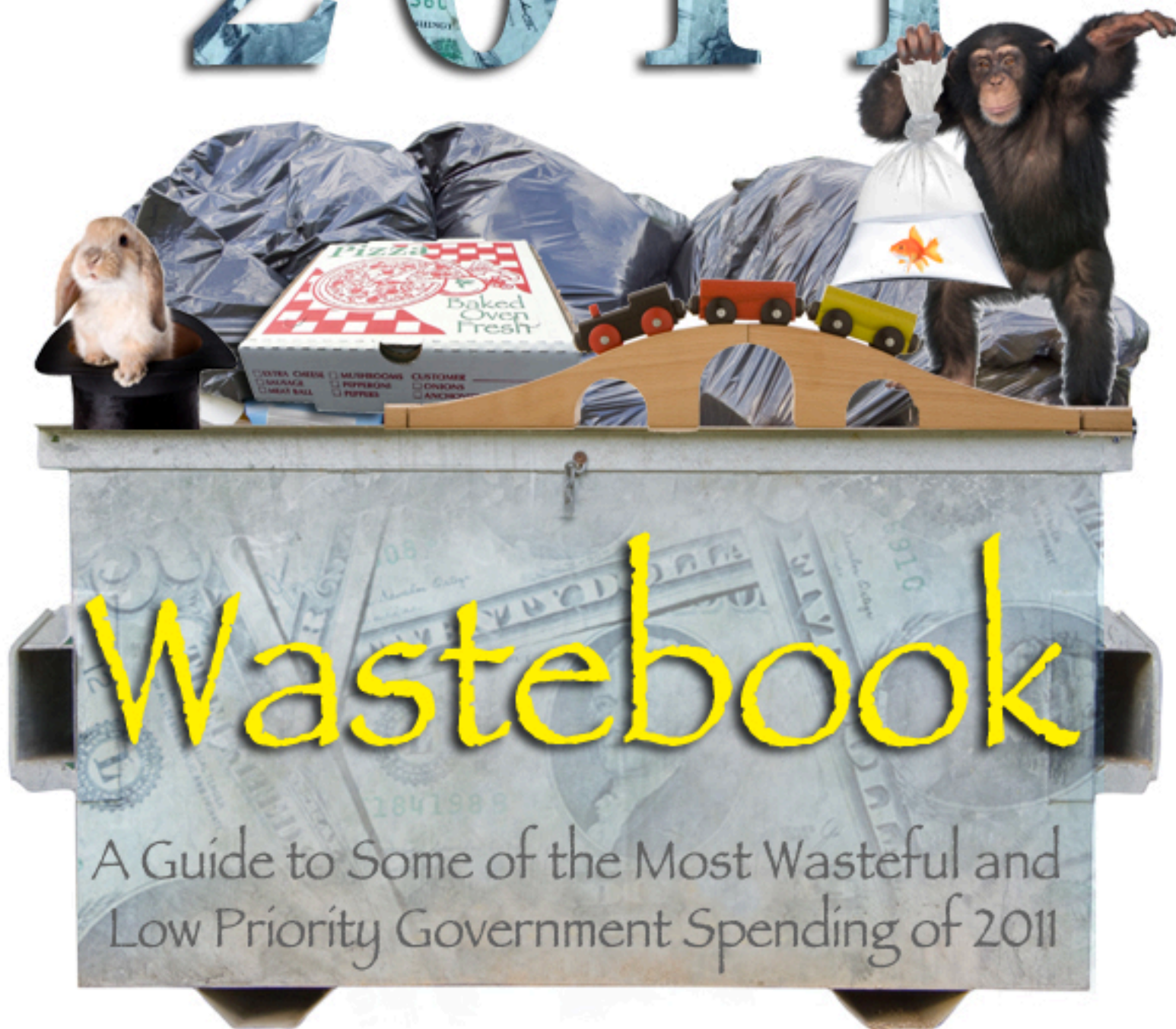


2011



Senator Tom Coburn

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Dear Taxpayer,

Robot dragons, video games, Christmas trees, snow cone machines, and chocolate.

This is not a Christmas wish list. These are just some of the ways the federal government spent your tax dollars this year.

Over the past 12 months, Washington politicians argued, debated and lamented about how to reign in the federal government's out of control spending. All the while, Washington was on a shopping binge, spending money we do not have on things we do not need, like the \$6.9 billion worth of examples provided in this report. The result: Instead of cutting wasteful spending, nearly \$2.5 billion was added *each day* in 2011 to our national debt,¹ which now exceeds \$15 trillion.

Congress deadlocked over whether or not savings could be found by closing loopholes within the complex tax code. Meanwhile, the IRS approved roughly \$1 billion in tax credits intended for energy efficiency home improvements to individuals who did not even own a house. These recipients included prisoners and children, some probably not even old enough to own a doll house.

While Congress bickered over whether or not the salaries of federal employees should be frozen, the federal government paid \$120 million to federal employees who were deceased.

Congress cannot now even agree on a plan to pay for the costs of extending jobless benefits to the millions of Americans who are still out of work. Yet, thousands of millionaires are receiving unemployment benefits and billions of dollars of improper payments of unemployment insurance are being made to individuals *with* jobs and others who do not qualify.

And remember those infamous bridges to nowhere in Alaska that became symbols of government waste years ago? The bridges were never built, yet the federal government still spent more than a million dollars just this year to pay for staff to promote one of the bridges.

Drowning in red ink, Congress refused to agree to reduce, cut, or eliminate any of these Washington monuments of government waste.

Ask yourself as you review each of the entries outlined in this report:

- **Can we afford these things when we are running annual deficits exceeding \$1 trillion?**
- **Do these initiatives match your understanding of the role of the federal government as outlined by the Enumerated Powers of the U.S. Constitution?**
- **Do these represent national priorities or do they reflect the wasteful spending habits threatening to bankrupt the future of the American Dream?**

President Obama's debt commission did issue recommendations to reduce the deficit by more than \$3.5 trillion over the next decade. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report identifying over \$200 billion in unnecessary, duplicative programs. But these suggestions and others were ignored by both chambers of Congress and the President.

Congress's deficit of courage to make tough budget decisions is best reflected by what it *did* agree to. The so-called *Budget Control Act* approved adding more than \$2 trillion to the nation's already staggering debt. The Super Committee it created to address the debt crisis was a super disappointment. And, the House and Senate appropriations committees also agreed to slash the budget of GAO, the one government agency that distinguished itself by identifying hundreds of billions of dollars in budget savings.

This report details 100 of the countless unnecessary, duplicative, or just plain stupid projects spread throughout the federal government and paid for with your tax dollars this year that highlight the out-of-control and shortsighted spending excesses in Washington.

So perhaps there was no bigger waste of the taxpayer's money in 2011 than Congress itself. The dismal 9 percent approval rating, the lowest ever recorded, would indicate the vast majority of Americans would agree.

Some of the projects listed within this report may indeed serve useful purposes or have merit and those associated with the projects may disagree that they are not national priorities.

This type of response is expected and this report is intended to add to the ongoing larger debate about national spending priorities and the proper role of the federal government in the context of our \$15 trillion national debt.

The year 2011 will be remembered as a period of unrest as outraged Americans of all political stripes—tea party patriots on the right and Occupy Wall Street activists on the left—took to the streets in anger and disgust with the direction of our nation. As you look at these examples, regardless of your personal political persuasion, ask yourself: Would you agree with Washington these represent national priorities or would you agree these reflect the wasteful spending habits that threaten to bankrupt the future of the American Dream?

Sincerely,



Tom A. Coburn, M.D.
U.S. Senator, Oklahoma

1) Politicians Partying on the Taxpayer Dime – (Presidential Election Campaign Fund) \$35.38 Million

Members of Congress are debating fewer bills, casting fewer votes, and holding fewer hearings. Meanwhile, important government agencies including the Department of Defense and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) are being targeted by Congress for spending reductions.

What Congress has not considered cutting is the budget for its own summertime parties, which are being planned and paid for well in advance.

Despite a federal budget crisis, taxpayers will be cutting checks this year to both political parties that could “help pay for the stages, confetti, balloons, food, and booze” for their political conventions.² The funds that are used to cover the conventions come from the Presidential Election Campaign Fund (PECF).



While defense and other important national priorities are being targeted for budget cuts in the coming years, more than \$35 million in taxpayer dollars has already been allocated for next summer's political conventions.

This year each political party will receive a \$17.7 million check that will pay a sizable portion of the convention costs. The PECF money will be distributed to each of the political convention committee's bank accounts.

According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), “Federal law places relatively few restrictions on how PECF convention funds are spent, as long as purchases are lawful and are used to ‘defray expenses incurred with respect to a presidential nominating convention.’”³ The money is, after all, essentially being used to throw a party. Besides funding the event itself, the money is used to pay for entertainment, catering, transportation, hotel costs, “production of candidate biographical films,” and a variety of other expenses.⁴

In 2008, it is likely then that taxpayers covered the Democrats bill at the Ritz Carlton and six-figure cost for housing convention staff and the Republican bill for \$32,250 bill for “speech coaching services” at their convention.⁵

The PECF is funded by a voluntary checkoff on tax returns. Individuals may elect to send \$3 of their tax bill to the fund rather than the general treasury, and married couples filing jointly may send \$6. The checkoff does not increase the amount of taxes owed or decrease any refund.⁶

2) Mangled Mango Effort Could Hurt Farmers It Meant to Help – (Pakistan) \$30 Million

In 2009, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) undertook a four-year, \$90 million effort to spur hiring and sales among Pakistani businesses. Two years later, the USAID Inspector General (USAID OIG) found “no measurable increases in sales and employment.”⁷

In four of five product areas USAID targeted – leather, livestock, textiles and dates – the agency abandoned its efforts roughly a year after it began them, with virtually nothing to show. For the



remainder of the project, it focused its effort (and funding) on the fifth product area: mangoes.⁸

USAID’s goal for mango farmers, to boost their sales by 20 percent,⁹ was as ill-fated as its grand plans for Pakistan’s date farmers, ranchers, and leather and textile manufacturers. Nearly \$30 million into the project, the USAID OIG audited the effort and concluded it “was not on track to achieve its main goal.” The mango effort, which consisted of providing 13 mango farmers with equipment to clean, freeze and store mangoes, was “stalled.”¹⁰

USAID’s mango project in Pakistan turned out to be a lemon: millions were spent to help farmers, but instead put them at risk of defaulting on loans as a result of their participation in the program.

What brought the mango effort to a standstill? Although the contractor executing the project, Chemonics, stated it had implemented “several enhancements to mango production,” the USAID OIG found only one farmer had received the promised equipment, but could not operate it because of a design flaw.¹¹

To make matters worse, the bungled effort could actually hurt the participating farmers by forcing them into default on loans they had taken out against expected sales that now may not happen, the IG found.¹²

3) Poor Planning Hobbles Air Force Green Energy Effort – (Department of Defense) \$14 Million

The Air Force attempted a \$14 million construction project to convert three Alaskan radar stations from diesel to wind turbine energy using stimulus funds, but had no assurance the project was properly planned or would result in any cost savings, the Department of Defense (DoD) Inspector General (IG) found.¹³

As a result, the IG told the Air Force to shut down their construction efforts at one station altogether, and to consider ending the other two before spending more taxpayer funds on the botched effort.¹⁴

The Air Force undertook the project with stimulus money earmarked for “shovel-ready” projects. But the IG found the turbine idea wasn’t “shovel-ready” when the Air Force committed to it.¹⁵

“[DoD] did not ensure that the three wind turbine projects. . . were adequately planned,” the IG wrote in an October 2011 report. “As a result, DoD cannot ensure that the three wind turbine projects are viable, that [DoD] personnel appropriately selected the projects for Recovery Act funding, and that Recovery Act funds were appropriately used.”¹⁶

As a result of the audit, the Air Force has decided to cancel construction on one of the turbines.¹⁷ But the unspent money from that turbine won’t be saved — they will use part of it to pay for cost overruns on the other two turbines. If there is any money left over after that, the Pentagon says, it won’t go back to the Treasury, but will be spent on “additional, appropriate. . . project(s) yet to be identified.”¹⁸



Due to shoddy planning, taxpayers blew millions on wind turbines located in an area that may not generate enough power to be viable.

4) Subsidy Program for Small Airports Fails to Help Most Recipients Achieve Sustainable Air Service – (Federal Aviation Administration) \$6 Million

A federal airport assistance program spent \$6 million to assist small airports in 2011,¹⁹ but has little to show for its efforts in over a decade of assistance.



Despite spending millions on the Small Community Air Service Development Program, subsidized flights have been canceled and many projects are never getting off the ground.

as evidenced by a series of audits and evaluations. A 2005 review by the Government Accountability Office found the program to “have achieved mixed results” and that only about half of its projects helped achieve sustainability.²¹ Results were worse in 2008 when an FAA Inspector General (IG) study found that “70 percent of the grants in our review failed to fully achieve their objectives.” Moreover, 62.5 percent of projects failed to attain even a single project goal.²²

SCASDP grants have also been used in past years for projects of questionable merit. Tunica Municipal Airport, located approximately 29 miles from Memphis metropolitan area, home to Memphis International Airport, received funds to re-establish scheduled commercial service route to Atlanta, which was cancelled years earlier.²³ Tunica, Mississippi, a small gaming community, received the grant based on a cost-sharing arrangement with local casinos, partnering tax payer dollars with gambling revenue to subsidize potential gamblers’ travels that did not want to make the short drive from the major airport in Memphis. The SCASDP funds have since expired and the scheduled service to and from Atlanta is no longer available from Tunica.²⁴

Neither President Obama nor President Bush requested funding for this program.²⁵

The Small Community Air Service Development Program (SCASDP) was created in 2000 to help underserved small community airports enhance their commercial air service with temporary help.²⁰ SCASDP grants go to communities seeking more air carrier service or lower air fares and are used mainly as revenue guarantees to attract new commercial routes that would otherwise be unsustainable, marketing enhancement for existing airlines, or a combination of both.

The goal of this program is for airports to use the grants to establish long-term sustainable air service. Most of the grants, however, have not been successful in helping airports attain sustainability,

5) Paying for Pancakes – (D.C) \$765,828

Almost \$800,000 of federal taxpayer funds went to subsidize “pancakes for yuppies” in the nation’s capital.²⁶



An International House of Pancakes (IHOP) franchise was built with financial assistance courtesy of Uncle Sam.²⁷ It was intended to help an “underserved community.”²⁸ The federal funding went to the Anacostia Economic Development Corporation. According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), “\$500,000 of the \$765,000 grant was used as an equity injection in DC Pancakes LLC for a 19% ownership interest.”²⁹ The remaining funds went to training costs for new employees, and other consultants.

The new IHOP is not located in an “underserved community” but a popular Washington D.C. neighborhood.³⁰ The neighborhood is Columbia Heights, which has become a local shopping hot spot for some and “one of Washington’s more desirable neighborhoods.”³¹ Other businesses in the area include Target, Bed Bath and Beyond, Best Buy, and Starbucks.³²

The restaurant chain is best known for its “world famous” buttermilk pancake flavors. Options on the menu include chocolate chip, CINN-A-STACK, and New York Cheesecake pancakes.³³ Observers noticed that “in this day of anti-obesity crusades, the secretary of Health and Human Services used her own discretionary grant money to subsidize a restaurant that serves two of Men’s Health magazine’s 20 most unhealthy restaurant dishes.”³⁴

6) The Super-Bridge to Nowhere – (AK) \$15.3 Million

The bridges to nowhere in Alaska may be *the* most infamous symbols of government excess and waste. Both bridges are stilling going nowhere and may never go anywhere. However, the bigger of the two bridge projects cost taxpayers more than \$15 million in 2011, even though it may never be constructed.



The proposed 2.7-mile bridge would connect a small Alaskan community with the Anchorage area, at a cost supporters say will run between \$650 million and \$700 million.³⁵ (Others estimate that it could cost more than \$4 billion.)³⁶

The Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority (KABATA), an organization created by the state of Alaska, is planning on paying for the expensive project with a \$5 toll on each one-way trip – the same toll as the San Francisco Bay Bridge, which is one-third the span of the proposed bridge.

At least \$15.3 million was spent on the project this year alone.³⁷ In total, more than \$65 million in federal taxpayer money has been directed to various aspects of the project,³⁸ including \$57,390³⁹ for a 14-minute video, “The Knik Arm Crossing, Bridge to Our Future.”⁴⁰

7) Dead Federal Employees Continue to Get Benefits Checks – (U.S. Office of Personnel Management) \$120 Million

The federal government sent an average of \$120 million in retirement and disability payments to deceased former federal employees every year for at least the past five years.⁴¹

In a September 2011 report, the Inspector General (IG) for the U.S. Office of Personnel Management found that “the amount of post-death improper payments is consistently \$100-\$150 million annually, totaling over \$601 million in the last five years.”⁴²

In one example the IG found, an annuitant’s son cashed his dead father’s checks for 37 years. The son’s scheme, which cost taxpayers more than \$500,000, was discovered in 2008, when he himself died. “The improper payment was not recovered,” the IG reported.⁴³



The federal government pays approximately \$120 million to deceased former federal employees annually.

8) Extreme Home Makeover: Federal Highway Funds to Transform Abandoned “Rock House” into Visitors Center – (OK) \$529,689

The Talimena Scenic Drive is a 54-mile stretch of scenic highway that runs from Talihina, Oklahoma, to Mena, Arkansas.

Indeed, some consider it one of the region’s most beautiful landscapes, and say it offers one of the nation’s most vibrant fall color tours. That may explain why the area has three federally-funded visitors and interpretive centers.

But even the most rabid fans of the Talimena Scenic Byway are probably at a loss why the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) thinks the area needs a *fourth* visitors center, at a cost to federal taxpayers of more than half a million dollars.

Indeed, the USDOT’s National Scenic Byways program has awarded the Talihina, Oklahoma Chamber of Commerce \$529,689 to convert an abandoned “rock house” in the community into the Talimena Scenic Drive Interpretive and Visitors Center.^{44 45}



The total cost of upgrading and renovating the dilapidated rock house is \$652,740, more than 14 times the value of the median home in Talihina,⁴⁶ a town of about 1,200 residents.

The federal grant for a duplicative visitor center makes even less sense when one considers that the scenic Talimena Drive isn’t the most the pressing transportation need in eastern Oklahoma: its crumbling road infrastructure makes the area 8th in the nation for its number of “structurally deficient” bridges.⁴⁷

9) Video Game Preservation – (NY) \$113,277



The International Center for the History of Electronic Games (ICHEG) received over \$100,000 in federal funds for video game preservation.⁴⁸ According to the organization's website, it "collects, studies, and interprets video games, other electronic games, and related materials and the ways in which electronic games are changing how people play, learn, and connect with each other, including across boundaries of culture and geography."⁴⁹

The center's collection includes over 35,000 video games and a wide variety of items related to the history of electronic games.⁵⁰ Examples of arcade video games in the collection include Space Invaders, Pac-Man, and Donkey Kong.⁵¹ The video game compilation also includes Super Mario Bros., Sonic the Hedgehog, and Doom.⁵²

According to the grant notification, the \$113,277 in federal funds will be used to "conduct a detailed conservation survey of approximately 6,900 of the 17,000 e-games in [the museum's] collection to determine the current condition of both the physical artifacts and their virtual content." The study is designed to "better position the museum to make its International Center for the History of Electronic Games collection available to visitors, researchers, and a broad public audience by providing images, videos of e-game play, and interpretation of the collection via exhibits and the Online Collections feature of its Web site."⁵³ Admission to the museum costs an adult \$13.⁵⁴



Over \$113,000 is being gobbled up by Pac-Man and other video games as part of a survey of games at the International Center for the History of Electronic Games.

10) Millions In Foreign Aid to... China? – (Department of State & U.S. Agency for International Development) \$17.80 Million

America's national debt recently surpassed \$15 trillion, much of which it borrowed from a variety of foreign countries. China, whose U.S. debt holdings exceed \$1.1 trillion,⁵⁵ is at the top of that list.

So taxpayers might be shocked to learn that each year the United States provides millions in aid to China.⁵⁶ In 2011, the U.S. government spent nearly \$18 million on foreign aid programs to its biggest sovereign lender.⁵⁷ This included \$2.5 million for social services and about \$4.4 million for programs to improve China's environment.⁵⁸

In fact, China can *better* afford to fund these programs than the United States at this point. While the U.S. public debt exceeds 100 percent of its Gross Domestic Product,⁵⁹ China's debt-to-GDP ratio is only 26 percent.⁶⁰



The U.S. is giving millions of dollars borrowed from China back to China as foreign aid.

11) Drug-Themed “Mellow Mushroom” Pizza Restaurant – (TX) \$484,000

Our nation currently faces many challenges; a shortage of beer and pizza, however, is rarely cited as one of them. Still, a private developer received nearly half a million dollars in federal funds to build Mellow Mushroom Pizza Bakers, a nationwide pizza chain, in Arlington, Texas.⁶¹ Mellow Mushroom is known for its tongue-in-cheek references to drug and hippie culture, sponsoring events such as the Sweetwater 420 Fest and calling its staff the “Shroom Crew.” “This Mellow will feature 3D artwork on the walls, mood rings, a lava room, and over 17 televisions all in a hippie chic setting,” one local news story reported on the new Arlington location.⁶²



Besides pizza and wide variety of beer, the restaurant’s menu consists of hoagie, salads, and calzones.⁶³ Reports indicate the project will cost approximately \$1.3 million, with \$484,000 in federal funding came from the Community Development Block Grant program at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.⁶⁴

Approval for the award was given unanimously despite opposition from some local business owners.⁶⁵ In part, some have noted that the location of the new restaurant “is still considered a high-risk environment” for private lenders, necessitating federal assistance.⁶⁶

Despite concerns, it gets good reviews on its pizza. According to one passer-through, “The guys in suits made a pretty mean pie, though; which just goes to show, you can’t judge a pizzeria by its hippie, drug-culture bonifides.”⁶⁷

12) Fruit Growers Receive Money for Celebrity Chef Show in Indonesia – (WA) \$100,000

Even though the connection between celebrity chefs and spurring economic growth is tenuous, at best, the Washington State Fruit Commission received \$100,000 in federal money for a “Celebrity Chef Fruit Promotion Road Show in Indonesia.” The event is designed to raise “consumer awareness through promoting our fruit in cooking recipes and demonstrations done by ‘Celebrity Chefs.’” Indonesia was selected because it is seen as “an emerging market with immediate potential of increased sales opportunities” for cherries, apples, and pears.⁶⁸

According to the Center for Tropical Fruit Studies at Bogor Agricultural University, however, Indonesia produces twice the amount of fruit the country consumes. Further, the fruit-of-choice of most Indonesians is the banana.⁶⁹



The Washington organization's plan would include participants from the Washington State Fruit Commission, Washington Apple Commission, and the Northwest Pear Bureau. Groups wanting to host a celebrity chef would be "required to sponsor their own in-store Fruit Fair with large displays, specialized point of sale, and sampling."⁷⁰

13) Remake of "Sesame Street" for Pakistan – (U.S. Agency for International Development) \$10 Million

In 2010, Rafi Peer Theatre Workshop, a Pakistani arts organization, was awarded \$20 million over the next four years,⁷¹ to create "130 episodes of an indigenously produced *Sesame Street*."⁷² The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided the first \$10 million for the project in FY 2011.⁷³ The Pakistan Sesame Street would be produced in cooperation with Sesame Workshop, creators of the original Sesame Street.⁷⁴

According to news sources, the show will be renamed "SimSim Humara" and set in "a lively village in Pakistan with a roadside tea and snacks stall, known as a dhaba, some fancy houses with overhanging balconies along with simple dwellings, and residents hanging out on their verandas."⁷⁵



Puppets created by Rafi Peer Theater Workshop

The only character adopted from the original Sesame Street will be the furry red monster Elmo. The rest of the puppet cast will be made up of new local characters, including a conceited well-dwelling crocodile named Haseen O Jameel⁷⁶, a “spirited adult woman, Baaji, who enjoys family time and tradition, and Baily, a hard-working donkey who longs to be a pop star.”⁷⁷

Faizaan Peerzada, the head of the Rafi Peer Theatre Workshop defended the \$20 million project, saying “The idea is to prepare and inspire a child to go on the path of learning, and inspire the parents of the child to think that the child must be educated.”⁷⁸

Besides the television show, the grant also includes funding for the following:

- “Radio programs based on the main puppet characters”
- “A dynamic website where children can ‘interact’ with their favorite puppet characters”
- 600 events with “live puppet performances using vehicles with trained puppeteers performing shows”
- 600 events with “mobile video vans displaying pre-developed puppet-based programs to children and communities”
- 9,000 small gatherings involving “thirty trained District Ambassadors playing video shows using laptop computers.”⁷⁹

The television and radio shows will include 78 shows in Urdu and 13 shows in each of the four major regional languages.⁸⁰

14) Money for Magic Museum – (MI) \$147,138

Hocus pocus! Nearly \$150,000 in federal funds went to the American Museum of Magic in Marshall, Michigan,⁸¹ which “celebrates magicians and their magic.”⁸²

The organization’s website advertises how visitors can learn about legendary performers, like Houdini and Thurston. The Magic Museum (slogan: “The Wonder of It All!”) also hosts a wide variety of lectures. The themes of the talks range from *Magicians and Card Sharps* to *Magicians Among the Spirits*, which “tells the tale of the often adversarial relationship between magicians and spirit mediums.”⁸³

The federal grant funds will help the center “better understand its various audiences and their potential interest in the history of magic entertainment.”⁸⁴



in the Soviet Union during the late 1970's, following its successful album, *Will the Circle be Unbroken*.⁹⁵ According to the director, "When they got over there they were treated like the Beatles."⁹⁶

The documentary is being produced with the help of the Grammy Museum of Los Angeles and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.⁹⁷

17) TVs and Gas Generators for Rural Vietnamese Villages – (PA) \$702, 558

Researchers at Pennsylvania State University at University Park wanted to fill a perceived gap in existing research about "the causal link between television and family formation and reproductive health."⁹⁸ Establishing that link with conclusive empirical research is difficult to do in the United States since most people have televisions. To carry out their work, the researchers identified 14 villages in "a remote, mountainous area of Vietnam that currently lack electricity."⁹⁹ Then, using a grant of over \$700,000 from the National Institutes of Health in 2011, they gave TVs and gasoline generators to families in seven of those villages.¹⁰⁰ People living in the other seven villages did not receive generators or TVs. The team will follow the villages for three years, surveying 4,200 people during that time. With these taxpayer dollars, the team seeks to examine the "causal impacts of television on family formation" and on "reproductive health knowledge" and activity as well the "specific mechanisms through which television effects operate."¹⁰¹

To date, the team has received more than \$1.3 million from American taxpayers to perform the study.¹⁰²

18) The 2nd Annual Hawaii Chocolate Festival – (HI) \$48,700

Hawaii will be holding a pretty "sweet" event next year, with some help from federal taxpayers.¹⁰³ Nearly \$50,000 in federal money was awarded in 2011 to the Hawaii Department of Agriculture to help support the "emerging Hawaiian cacao industry and provide outreach during the 2nd annual Hawaiian Chocolate Festival."¹⁰⁴ The 2012 Hawaii Chocolate Festival will "highlight the culinary talents and products specifically linked to Hawaii's chocolate industry."¹⁰⁵ The event will also serve as networking opportunities for chocolate growers to meet potential chocolate distributors.¹⁰⁶

But in case festival-goers were under the impression enjoying chocolate was a guilty pleasure only for its calorie content, they should think again. One of the featured vendors, Madre Chocolate, suggested that marketers have tried to divert



customers from asking questions about “social and environmental justice.”¹⁰⁷

The 2011 chocolate festival, which cost \$25 at the door and lasted five hours, gave attendees the chance to taste 10 different chocolates, as well as “Ono Pops’ new chocolate popsicles, 360 Chocolate Vodka and Kona Brewing Company’s new chocolate beer.”¹⁰⁸

19) Children, Prisoners, and Others Who Don’t Own Homes Awarded Energy Efficient Home Improvement Tax Credits (Internal Revenue Service) – \$1 Billion

As much as \$1 billion or more in tax credits for energy efficient residential improvements¹⁰⁹ are being claimed by individuals with no record of owning a home, including prisoners and underage children.

The total amount improperly claimed this year or previously is unknown. But based upon a review of a statistically valid sample by the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA), 30 percent of the individuals who claimed the credit “had no record of owning a home.”¹¹⁰ Nearly a half-a-million dollars of tax credits were being claimed by hundreds of prisoners and children within the TIGTA sample.

TIGTA determined the prisoners who filed tax returns were allowed Residential Energy Credits by the IRS, even though they were in prison for all of the year in which the energy-saving improvements were purportedly made.¹¹¹

“Contract law generally exempts children under the age of 18 from being bound by the terms of a contract,” according to TIGTA. However, the sample analysis “identified 100 individuals under the age of 18 (26 of these were under the age of 14) who were allowed \$61,091 in Residential Energy Credits. The youngest individual receiving the credit was 3 years old.”¹¹² In effect, the IRS approved tens of thousands of dollars of tax credits for home energy efficiency improvements to children, some not even old enough to own a doll house.



The TIGTA analysis found “the IRS cannot verify whether individuals claiming Residential Energy Credits are entitled to them” and does not even require applicants to provide any proof of the costs claimed for energy efficiency improvements made to their residence.¹¹³

TIGTA noted the IRS has data that can be used to identify prisoners, underage children, and others improperly claiming these credits.¹¹⁴ To address these findings, the IRS has agreed to begin requesting specific information about the homes, including the address, for which these credits are being claimed.¹¹⁵

20) Stimulating Online Soap Operas – (Department of Commerce) \$936,818

It remains unclear how many American jobs were “saved or created” by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of, but we now know that the stimulus at least put actor Billy Dee Williams back to work.¹¹⁶

The Department of Commerce awarded \$28.5 million to One Economy Corp. “to generate broadband adoption in under-served communities.”¹¹⁷ One of the projects funded by One Economy Corp.¹¹⁸ was to create a web-based television series, “Diary of a Single Mom,” which “chronicles the lives and challenges of three single mothers and their families trying to get ahead despite obstacles that all single mothers face, such as childcare, healthcare, education, and finances.”¹¹⁹ The cast includes famous actor Billy Dee Williams.¹²⁰

One Economy Corp. spent \$706,065 to produce the series and paid Townsend Entertainment, Inc. \$230,753 to direct the show.¹²¹

Every day, single mothers in the real world must find ways to balance family and finances and would be better served with practical assistance rather than federally funded access to on-line soap operas.



21) Taxpayer Dollars Go to Promoting Christmas Trees – (MI) \$75,000

“Yule” be happy to know that \$75,000 of your tax dollars went to “increase awareness about the role Michigan plays in the production of trees and poinsettias.”¹²²

It is unclear why the state needs help promoting a very successful industry. The \$40 million industry is the third largest in the nation in total trees harvested¹²³ with about 3 million trees.¹²⁴ The state also grows more than 2.3 million Poinsettias’ annually.¹²⁵

The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) teamed up with the Michigan Christmas Tree Association in hopes of increasing sales of locally grown Christmas trees. They plan to launch a large marketing campaign, including a website,¹²⁶ aimed at promoting the local economy, raising awareness about the environmental factors involved in using fake trees, and increasing awareness of the emotional benefit of having a real tree and poinsettias in the home.¹²⁷



22) Taxpayer Money Supports an International Art Exhibition – (Venice, Italy) \$350,000

The U.S. State Department awarded \$350,000 in federal funds for the U.S. Presentation at the 54th International Art Exhibition in Venice, Italy, which lasted from June 4 through November 27.¹²⁸ The agency selected a collaboration by a Spanish-speaking team living and working in Puerto Rico, Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla. The exhibits of these artists “will feature new commissions incorporating interactive sculpture, performance, and sound elements. Designed to offer rich opportunities for dialogue and interaction with the public, their projects will appeal to a broad audience.”¹²⁹ Previous work by the long-time collaborators involved a pianist playing a piano backwards and over the top of the keyboard while standing in a hole cut through the middle of the piano.¹³⁰



The New York Times reported on the artist’s work stating “[t]he show, organized by the Indianapolis Museum of Art, seems to exist in its own bubble, as if surrounded by an invisible shield. Certainly its centerpiece, “Track and Field,” gives it a slightly armed and dangerous feeling: installed in front of the American Pavilion, the piece is an immense inverted [British] military tank topped by a treadmill that shifts into noisy action for 15 minutes every hour when a [former Olympic] runner uses the treadmill.”¹³¹ The artist explained that an American tank was their first choice, but it was not available. The entire installation is entitled “Gloria” and one critic believed the overturned tank symbolized America’s faded glory.¹³²

Other pieces in the exhibit include *Armed Freedom Lying on a Sunbed* (pictured) and “[a] custom-made pipe organ with an automatic teller machine (ATM).”¹³³ The organ plays a tune when an individual uses the ATM.¹³⁴

The Indianapolis Museum of Art notes, “[t]he U.S. Pavilion is presented by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of



State, which supports and manages the official United States participation at selected international exhibitions.”¹³⁵ The total cost of the exhibit was approximately \$1.48 million, of which \$350,000 was from the U.S. Department of State.¹³⁶

23) Rockin’ Robins: Study Looks for Connections Between Cocaine and Risky Sex Habits of Quail – (KY) \$175,587

What common sense suggests, science has confirmed over and over again: namely, that cocaine use is linked to increased risky sexual behavior.¹³⁷ Just to be sure, however, one federal agency thought it should test the hypothesis on a new subject: Japanese quail.

The University of Kentucky received a grant of \$181,406 in 2010 from the National Institute of Health to study how cocaine enhances the sex drive of Japanese quail.¹³⁸ In 2011, grant funding was extended and an additional \$175,587 was provided for the study.¹³⁹ The total awarded to the project will be \$356,933.¹⁴⁰

The study seeks to verify “the clinical observations that indicated that cocaine use in humans may increase sexual motivation, thereby increasing the likelihood of the occurrence of high-risk sexual behavior.”¹⁴¹ The researcher conducting the study highlighted how “Japanese quail are ‘ideal’ animals to use when studying the link between sex and drugs because the ‘birds readily engage in reproductive behavior in the laboratory.”¹⁴² University of Kentucky’s website stated that “quail provide a convenient and interesting alternative to standard laboratory rats and pigeons.”¹⁴³ This study is slated to continue through 2015.¹⁴⁴

24) Walter Clore Wine and Culinary Center – (WA) \$2 Million

The Walter Clore Wine and Culinary Center has been trying to raise \$6.3 million for a new facility in Washington wine country, and it got a big boost from the government this year.

A \$2 million federal grant¹⁴⁵ will help pay for a “multimillion-dollar wine exhibition and culinary center” in Washington State.¹⁴⁶ The center, owned by the Port of Benton, hopes to educate the public about Washington State’s diverse wine and food industry.

“The Clore Center is expected to be a destination for wine and food education, featuring a tasting room, kitchen, exhibits, teaching vineyards, gardens, classrooms and conference rooms,” notes a recent press report.¹⁴⁷ The center’s website also notes how the “Vineyard Pavilion is adaptable for meetings, events and weddings.”¹⁴⁸

For a time it did not appear as if local officials were interested in chipping in for the new center, despite vowing years earlier to make a small contribution. When the time came to provide the promised \$100,000, a dispute arose between the Port of Benton and city commissioners.¹⁴⁹

In addition the new Clore Center, the Port of Benton oversees two other local wine destinations, including Prosser Vintner's Village¹⁵⁰ and Prosser Wine and Food Park.¹⁵¹

Federal money comes from the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration.¹⁵²



Patrons enjoy a glass of wine at the Clore Center grand opening.

25) Program Subsidizes Prosperous Industries – (Department of Agriculture) \$200 Million

The Department of Agriculture's Market Access Program (MAP) spends \$200 million annually to subsidize advertising, market research, and travel around the globe for various industry groups, cooperatives, corporations, and their members or employees.¹⁵³

But the industries that benefit from the program are among the country's most productive. For example, the U.S. cotton industry, via Cotton Council International, received \$20.3 million from MAP¹⁵⁴ in the same year (2010) in which it earned revenues of \$5.3 billion, according to USDA estimates.¹⁵⁵

Most recently, MAP used taxpayer dollars to subsidize a popular reality television show in India where "[a]spiring designers create fashionable outfits using cotton."¹⁵⁶

Well-known American brands like Welch's, Sunkist, and others have received tens of millions of dollars from taxpayers to promote their products.¹⁵⁷ Since 1999, total reimbursements for MAP's international market promotion activities have reached nearly \$2 billion.¹⁵⁸

What's more, the program duplicates other Agriculture Department efforts, and it is difficult to see what impact it has. (For example, the United States is already the world's largest exporter of cotton.¹⁵⁹) As the *New York Times* noted in February, "even the Obama administration, which generally supports the program, wants to reduce it by 20 percent, saying it 'overlaps with other Department of Agriculture trade promotion programs, and its economic impact is unclear.'" ¹⁶⁰

26) Surveying Impact of Anti-HIV Videos for L.A. City Buses – (CA) \$358,005

The National Institutes of Health is funding a group of researchers to poll young African-American males in poor Los Angeles neighborhoods who ride city buses featuring short anti-HIV themed dramatic videos.

The video series, developed by the Centers for Disease Control as part of their behavioral research activities on gay, bisexual, and MSM [Men who have Sex with Men] health, consists of 27 three-minute videos with storylines emphasizing HIV risk-reduction.¹⁶¹ The videos are to be played repetitively on TV screens installed in Los Angeles city buses over a 7-month period.¹⁶²

For \$358,005, University of Pennsylvania researchers will wait at bus stops in "impoverished African-American neighborhoods" around L.A. and survey 1,600 young African-American men as they enter and exit buses.¹⁶³ ("Data will be collected in private spaces near the bus stops," the researchers explain in their project summary.¹⁶⁴)

The video "soap-opera style" series, entitled "Reality Check," features storylines about "HIV prevention goals of promoting norms, intentions, and behaviors around HIV testing, condom use, abstinence, and reducing homophobia and HIV stigma."¹⁶⁵ Before subjects board and after they disembark the buses, researchers will quiz the young men on "HIV testing. . . theoretical mediators of testing, condom use, and abstinence, and reducing homophobia and HIV/AIDS stigma."¹⁶⁶

The researchers plan to follow up with the interview subjects at three and six months.¹⁶⁷

For those who miss previous episodes of the CDC-produced drama series, or prefer to watch them the privacy of their homes, the videos will also be available on YouTube.¹⁶⁸

Rather than spending taxpayer funds on untested programs that seem unlikely to help people, the government could better use the money to fund domestic HIV/AIDS treatment programs and drugs.

27) Federal Funds Used to Buy iPads for Kindergarteners – (ME) \$96,000

Nearly \$100,000 in federal stimulus funds went toward purchasing iPad 2 tablets for students in one school district in Maine.¹⁶⁹ Technology is something that students should be acclimated to at an early age. However, it may be wise to get them to read and write first before they are handed an iPad.

Many parents in the community agree. The Auburn Citizens for Responsible Education posted a survey online asking, “Do you agree with Auburn’s initiative to provide all kindergarten students with iPads?”¹⁷⁰ The Facebook poll showed the following results:¹⁷¹

- Yes = 357
- No = 7,624

Some parents are concerned that the impacts of “teacher-directed” education could be impacted by the introductions of iPads into the Classroom. Tracy Levesque, one of the parent group leaders said the students may start thinking that “if my teacher is talking to me and I have an iPad, I’m going to completely tune her out, tune out my surroundings, because I just got this thing.”¹⁷² Many in the community also think the money could be put to better use, such as reducing class size and other more important priorities for the school district.

Some experts have called the project “ridiculous,” but “not because of the iPads but because of the amount of money.”¹⁷³

28) \$1 Million Ad Campaign Encourages Patients to Visit Government Health Agency’s Website and be More Involved in Their Own Medical Decisions – (Agency for Health Research and Quality) \$1.06 Million

Americans spend more tax dollars on healthcare than most other countries, according to a study released last month by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.¹⁷⁴ Perhaps that is because too many tax dollars intended for health care are not actually spent on health care. In fact, a number of studies have shown that roughly one in three dollars in our nation’s health care system do not prevent anyone from getting sick or help anyone get well. For example, this year the Agency for Health Research and Quality (AHRQ) spent more than \$1 million¹⁷⁵ on a public relations campaign encouraging patients to become better informed about their medical options and to visit the agency’s website.¹⁷⁶

The total cost of AHRQ’s “Treatment Options Awareness” campaign amounted to \$1,059,000, “which covers the costs of actual production of the TV, radio, print, Web, and outdoor ads; packaging and distribution to public service directors at media outlets; and promotion and monitoring of the ads.”^{177 178}

While it is important for patients to be involved in their own health care decisions, a million dollar government ad campaign is both unnecessary and wasteful.

Patients are already actively involved in making their own health care choices. “Four in five Internet users have searched the Web for health care information, most often checking on specific diseases and treatments,” according to a Pew Forum internet study released earlier this year,¹⁷⁹ In fact, “eight in ten internet users look online for health information, making it the third most popular online pursuit” among those tracked by the project.¹⁸⁰

The real problem is that too many patients have limited options as a result of not having access to quality care. Almost 50 million Americans lack health insurance.¹⁸¹ With nearly \$8,000 spent per American every year on health care,¹⁸² more than 130 uninsured Americans could have been provided care over the past 12 months for the cost of this government run ad campaign.

29) Study: Political Candidates Should Adopt “Green” Positions – (CA) \$200,000

Political candidates can get more votes by taking a “green” position, according to a study funded by the federal government. The National Science Foundation awarded a \$200,000 grant to study how the electorate reacts to political candidates’ stances on climate change.¹⁸³

A Stanford researcher polled potential Republican, Democrat, and Independent voters to determine whether politicians can gain or lose votes based on whether they take “green” positions. The research determined, shockingly, that “people who pay close attention to the issue [climate change] and consider it to be extremely important to them personally — are likely to base their votes on this issue.”¹⁸⁴

The study appears to be borne of a reaction to last year’s “ClimateGate” scandal. Some survey respondents were shown “news stories about the East Anglia emails and the questionable aspects of the IPCC reports,” while others were not. Their opinions were measured based on the differences.

While the study appears to be policy-neutral, upon closer inspection it is clearly intended to help politicians feel more comfortable voting for certain legislation. “A collateral benefit of the research proposed here is that it will help these legislators to interpret the widely-publicized poll results, to become increasingly sensitive to the impact of scientific methodology of survey findings, and to plan their legislative efforts based upon veridical rather than misleading claims about what the American public believes and what it wants its government to implement in this arena.”¹⁸⁵



The National Science Foundation spent \$200,000 to determine how politicians can gain votes by taking “green” positions on environmental issues.

30) Federal Transportation Dollars Go to Shipwreck Sites and Horse-Drawn Carriage Exhibits – (WI) \$916,567

The Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) received \$169,567¹⁸⁶ in federal highway dollars to conduct “archaeological surveys of five shipwrecks...that represent a cross section of historically significant vessel types that have sailed Wisconsin waters.”¹⁸⁷

Funding comes from the Federal Highway Administration’s Transportation Enhancement program. Nearly a third of Wisconsin’s major roads are poor or mediocre condition, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers.¹⁸⁸ By law, however, regardless of other pressing transportation needs, states must spend a certain percentage of their Surface Transportation Program (STP) funding on Transportation Enhancement activities.¹⁸⁹ Even then, however, those activities must “relate to surface transportation.”¹⁹⁰

WHS also received \$800,000 to install exhibits in a carriage museum and a visitor center at Wade House,¹⁹¹ a historical tourist destination in Wisconsin. The Wesley Jung Carriage Museum “will bring compelling stories within the world of horse-drawn transportation to life in vignette settings, interactive exhibits and hands-on experiences.”¹⁹²

31) Veterans Administration Feeling Some Heat After an Eleven Day Conference in Arizona – (Department of Veterans Affairs) \$221,540

In January 2011, fifty employees from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs attended an eleven day conference at a resort in Scottsdale, Arizona. The final cost exceeded \$221,000.¹⁹³

The purpose of the conference was to “discuss revisions in how disability ratings are assigned for veterans seeking compensation and health care.”¹⁹⁴ But the discussion concluded with a large tab for taxpayers: \$90,540 for travel, \$30,000 for hotel accommodations, \$4,000 for audiovisual, and \$97,000 for the contractor in charge of the meeting. The total cost was \$221,540.¹⁹⁵

To put that number in perspective, that is enough money to pay the annual disability compensation of six disabled combat veterans.¹⁹⁶ Additionally, with the availability of teleconferencing, conferences are, in large part, no longer necessary.

32) Boosting Alaskan Tourism with Podcasts about NSF Research Projects – (AK) \$300,000

Next time tourists in Alaska wonder what to do with a backseat full of cranky kids, they'll have the National Science Foundation to thank for coming up with a solution. Parents can drive them to a national park, load a podcast and watch scientists talk about their research.



NSF awarded \$300,000 to researchers at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks to create a proof-of-concept for a “new information tool for the public,” a digitally integrated guide.¹⁹⁷ According to the grant’s abstract, the guide will weave “a tourist’s visit with place-based stories of meaningful science research in the Arctic.”¹⁹⁸ Initial designs will focus on research in Alaska’s national parks, with a main goal “to spark interest in young people who have been increasingly disconnected from nature.”¹⁹⁹

The project is described on the National Park Service website as “a documentary poem crafted to entertain, stimulate and enlighten the tourist with a ‘story’ about the scientist’s research. If a tourist is sparked by a scientist’s ‘story’ they will make personal connections and be motivated to further participation and social interplay via on-line science networks.”²⁰⁰ It will feature documentaries with such titles as “I can qayaq or baidarka can you qayaq or baidarka?” and “I feel the earth move, YIKES!”

Amazingly, there are few resources to help tourists find out if scientific research happened in the places they want to visit. “Opportunities to learn directly from the scientists themselves are almost non-existent ... tourists have no capability to link such research with places they visit.”²⁰¹

The digital tool will use traditional technology like broadcast television and publications and will incorporate Facebook, Twitter, and social media into a tourist’s experience (which, the abstract notes, may be “far from computers, electricity, and the Internet”).²⁰² The investigators say that their tool will “widen the general public’s interaction with the cultural and native environment by allowing them to access Web sites and load their handheld mobile devices with engaging descriptions of research.”²⁰³

33) Annual Rent for the Storage of Thousands of Pieces of Unused Furniture and Equipment – (Internal Revenue Service) \$862,000

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) spent nearly a million dollars a year to store unused furniture and equipment. A Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) report found that the “IRS had 22,486 items that had been in storage for at least 18 months without any activity.”²⁰⁴ TIGTA determined the rental costs for the nearly 35,000 square feet of warehouse space used to store the unused office furniture and equipment “is approximately \$862,000 annually.”²⁰⁵

The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration noted, “While storing new or used furniture and equipment for future use may seem like a good use of taxpayer funds, the IRS needs to periodically evaluate and determine whether the storage of such items makes continued sense.”²⁰⁶ The August 2011 TIGTA report also says the IRS would implement procedures to address this problem.²⁰⁷

34) To Trust or Not to Trust Tweets, That is the Question – (MA) \$492,005

Do you trust your twitter feed? The National Science Foundation is providing \$492,055 in taxpayer dollars to researchers at Wellesley College to answer that question.²⁰⁸



Researchers cite “the tremendous growth of the so-called Social Web” as a factor that will “put new stress to human abilities to act under time pressure in making decisions and determine the quality of information received.”²⁰⁹ Their work will analyze the “trails of trustworthiness” that people leave on information channels like Twitter.²¹⁰ They will study how users mark certain messages as trustworthy and how they interact with others whose “trust values” are known.²¹¹

The NSF grant also includes funding for an online course to study “what critical thinking means in our highly interconnected world,” in which we might be “interacting regularly with people we may never meet.”²¹²

35) Failed Energy-Saving Project in Pakistan – (U.S. Agency for International Development) \$12 Million

The citizens of Pakistan experience power outages every day which last between 4 to 16 hours. In 2009, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) decided to tackle the problem with a 3-year, \$23 million project to help industries in Pakistan develop plans on how to use less energy.²¹³

As the USAID Inspector General (USAID OIG) recently reported, one year and \$2 million later, USAID had achieved “modest progress,” but instead of giving up it switched tactics: it would instead focus on convincing Pakistani farmers to get rid of old, energy-wasting irrigation pumps and buy new, energy-efficient ones. USAID would subsidize half the cost of the new pumps, at an estimated cost to the U.S. taxpayer of \$1,400 per pump. USAID planned to replace 11,000 pumps over the two years left in the program.²¹⁴

But by September 2011, USAID’s Inspector General found, USAID had replaced only 963 pumps – less than 1/10th its goal. (The IG estimates that by the end of the project, only 1,500 pumps will be replaced.) Unfortunately, the price tag to the U.S. taxpayer did not change: The contractor in charge of the project spent \$10 million on the effort so far, driving the per-pump cost up to \$8,500.²¹⁵

While severe flooding during the project hampered the effort, the IG concluded the project’s designers faced other daunting obstacles, including farmer’s disinclination to participate in the program. An internal study identified some of the reasons farmers were deterred: additional masonry and electrical costs that USAID did not help defray; the availability of Chinese-made pumps at a lower cost than the ones offered by USAID; and a difference of opinion with USAID over the value of their old pumps.²¹⁶ Two years later, the only difference USAID made with the project appears to have been wasting \$12 million.

36) The Government “Cheese Trail” – (OR) \$50,400

The Oregon Cheese Guild received \$50,000 in taxpayer funding to promote the Oregon cheese industry. The guild plans to support a statewide “Oregon Cheese Trail” that will link dairies, restaurants and shops along the way.²¹⁷



The federal funds will be used to produce “24 video vignettes” on cheese to highlight the cheese industry in Oregon, featuring cheese farmers, cheese experts, and the history of cheese in the state.²¹⁸

It is unclear whether the promotion is necessary. Some of the state’s smaller operations are still grappling with how to accommodate the growing interest in the small farms that are designed for goats or cows.²¹⁹

The head of the Oregon Cheese Guild praised the grant, explaining that the Cheese industry in the state is “growing along the same lines as beer and wine.”²²⁰

37) Unnecessary Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative Overlaps Other Federal Housing Programs – (Housing and Urban Development) \$168 Million

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) highlighted eliminating *NeighborWorks America* as one of its budget options in 2009 because it is “unnecessary”²²¹ and duplicates other U.S Housing and Urban Develop (HUD) initiatives.²²² According to CBO, “other federal programs— particularly those in HUD—also support efforts to rehabilitate low-income housing and promote home ownership and community development. Similarly, if the Congress wished to continue to fund mortgage and financial counseling services for people facing foreclosure, it could do so without channeling the money through *NeighborWorks America*.”²²³

NeighborWorks America is a congressionally-chartered nonprofit group, officially known as the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, providing technical and financial aid for housing, “neighborhood revitalization,” and “community building” as well as “grants, training and education, and publications.”²²⁴ In FY 2011, Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation received nearly \$170 million in federal funding.²²⁵

38) Federal Funds Go Toward Encouraging Bed and Breakfasts to Sell Locally Grown Products – (NY) \$73,824

The U.S. Department of Agriculture issued a grant of \$73,824 to the New York State Department of Agriculture²²⁶ to encourage bed and breakfasts to serve locally grown products at their establishments.²²⁷

The state agency says that the “program will encourage B&B operators to feature locally produced food and



agricultural products in meals served to their guests,” and to “carry shelf stable local products such as jams, maple syrup and sauces, and to measure the economic impact on producers of sales made through this specialized marketing channel.”²²⁸

New York Agriculture Commissioner praised this initiative, saying, “this continues our efforts to boost locally produced food products in New York and to encourage agribusiness.”²²⁹ The hope is this grant will stimulate economic growth for New York agriculture producers.²³⁰

Before the federal money was even spent, many New York bed and breakfasts were already serving locally grown products and promoting to visitors where they can shop for these same foods. As an example, the Bella Rose B&B in the Finger Lakes region offers a list of farmers markets on their website where they buy local food that they serve.²³¹

39) Grant for Museum on the History of Skiing – (NH) \$86,014

A ski museum in New Hampshire received an \$86,000 federal grant to create a new exhibit telling the story of skiing from the Stone Age to present day.²³² The center collects and displays a wide variety of items related to the history of skiing, including equipment, films, photos, art, and clothing.²³³ For example, visitors can view how skis have advanced over the years from the “primitive wooden slats with leather toe-straps” to “the earliest shaped skis of the 1990s.”²³⁴

The federal dollars will specifically go toward modifying “the museum’s permanent exhibition to expand interpretation of the history, geography, sociology, demography, and overall significance of skiing as a sport, economic engine, military strategy, and recreational activity.”²³⁵

The ski grant was one of 160 awarded by the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services through the “Museums for America” program.²³⁶ Total spending on these grants was nearly \$18.8 million.



40) Wartime Contracting Waste and Fraud Costs Taxpayers Billions – (Iraq and Afghanistan) \$4.38 billion²³⁷

In its final report to Congress, the Commission on Wartime Contracting estimated that “[a]t least \$31 billion, and possibly as much as \$60 billion, has been lost to contract waste and fraud during military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan – at the mid-range of the estimate, this

amounts to \$12 million every day for the past 10 years.”²³⁸ This would amount to wartime contracting waste and fraud costing the taxpayer nearly \$4.4 billion in 2011.²³⁹

The Commission examined contracting costs in the two contingency operations from FY 2002 through the end of FY 2011.²⁴⁰ According to the 248-page report, “Spending on contracts and grants performed in Iraq and Afghanistan in support of operations in those countries is expected to exceed \$206 billion through the end of fiscal year (FY) 2011.”²⁴¹

The Commission found that many factors have contributed to waste, fraud and abuse in contracting that supports both military and reconstruction activities in Iraq and Afghanistan. Causes include an overreliance on contractors, failure to choose sustainable projects, and a lack of oversight and interagency coordination.²⁴²

Additionally, the report highlights several instances where waste, fraud, and abuse were occurring in ways that benefitted our enemies in Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁴³ According to the report, “In Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. funds have been diverted to insurgents and warlords as a cost of doing business in the country” and “Because they directly strengthen the insurgency, diverted funds pose far more danger than other kinds of waste and have a disproportionately adverse impact on the U.S. effort.”²⁴⁴

The military and diplomatic agencies’ poor contracting practices have cost both the lives and money of Americans and jeopardize the success of our efforts there.²⁴⁵

4I) U.S. Hops Industry Travels to China – (WA) \$111,413



What should leave taxpayers hopping mad, more than \$111,000 in federal funds will pay for a delegation of hop and brewing experts to travel to China to conduct a series of classes for Chinese breweries.²⁴⁶ In June 2012, the Hop Growers of America (HGA) plans to send a team consisting of three contractors, including a marketing firm with expertise in hops and beer brewing, a US brewing consultant, and a Chinese firm to recruit breweries and to translate.²⁴⁷

The goal is to target China's top 20 breweries and conduct a series of seminars on the benefits of brewing with U.S. hops.²⁴⁸ The group will make multiple trips to China to conduct the seminars.²⁴⁹

42) Mummies Return in 3-D – (WI) \$24,632

As if the silver screen wasn't enough, for the price of admission, visitors to the Milwaukee Public Museum may soon be able to experience 3-D mummies. With a federal grant worth \$24,632,²⁵⁰ the museum will provide a "3-D high-definition, full color true holographic or holographic-like exhibit of a virtual mummy unwrapping."²⁵¹



Experts from various fields will be called in to assist, including those with experience in medical imaging, mummy CT analysis, and 3-D rendering.

"While CT scanning of mummies is not new, our use of the latest technologies will provide greater clarity, enabling the use of innovative presentation systems."²⁵²

The 3-D mummies are part of a bigger "Mummies of the World" exhibit. Taxpayers are paying twice for this exhibit, once in the pocketbooks and then the price of admission. The tickets for entrance can cost up to \$24.50.²⁵³

43) Taxpayer Money Pays for "RapidGuppy" Cell Phone Game – (CA) \$149,990

Researchers at the University of California-Riverside have pushed the mission of the National Science Foundation to new limits. In 2011, they received an NSF grant of almost \$150,000 to create a video game called "RapidGuppy" for cell phones and other mobile devices.²⁵⁴ In the game, targeted for students 12-21 years old, users control the growth and evolution of a guppy.²⁵⁵ Students can gain insight into the environmental factors that cause the fish to adapt.²⁵⁶ To reach the public, the researchers will use "[a]n extensive social media campaign," which they see as increasing the public level of interest in evolution, genetic change, and science careers.²⁵⁷ Using taxpayer dollars, "RapidGuppy" might soon be on Facebook, right alongside "FarmVille" and "Scrabble."

The university researchers will partner with several private companies to create the game, including Magmic, Inc., which has over 100 games available for mobile devices and over \$10 million per year in revenue.^{258,259,260}

44) Duplicative Program to Help Other Countries Manage Their Forests – (Department of Agriculture) \$9.49 Million

The U.S. Forest Service spends millions of dollars each year to help other nations promote sustainable forest management, even though it's not part of its official mission, and duplicates other government efforts.

The International Forestry Program “deliver[s] technical assistance, policy development, and disaster preparedness and response by trained forestry experts” to international partners.²⁶¹ In Fiscal Year 2011, the program received nearly \$9.5 million in federal funding.²⁶²

Noting that it overlaps with significant programs of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and “is not consistent with the Forest Service’s mission to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations,” the White House recommended eliminating the program.²⁶³

45) Federal Transportation Dollars to Make Las Vegas Highways Beautiful – (NV) \$697,006

Each year, millions of federal transportation funds are used for scenic beautification. Two projects in Nevada cost taxpayers at least \$690,000 this year.²⁶⁴ Specifically, the projects included “the installation of hardscape landscaping (decorative rocks, boulders, etc.) and native vegetation. They are located at the interchanges of Flamingo Road and Eastern Avenue on the 215 Bruce Woodbury Beltway.”²⁶⁵

One local resident who uses one of the interchanges frequently was not impressed by the expensive beautification project. “I’m busy watching where I’m going. I’m not looking at landscape improvements and stamped concrete.”²⁶⁶

Unfortunately, there is little that local officials can do to re-direct the money to better uses. “We applied for the federal enhancement dollars and those federal enhancement dollars can only be used for landscaping and pedestrian type improvements,” explains the top civil engineer at the Clark County Public Works Traffic Management Division.²⁶⁷

A Nevada Department of Transportation (N-DOT) official expressed concern with federal restrictions that prohibit states from directing money where it is really needed. “It’s really getting out of hand to where these pots of money have these constraints associated with them and you can’t spend money where you want to.”²⁶⁸

The beautification project comes on the heels of another controversy regarding the award of a \$120 million contract to widen a portion of the beltway. The losing bidder sued Clark County when the county failed to select its proposal, even though it estimated costs \$4.5 million lower

than the awardee. The losing bidder, a nonunion company, asserted the county denied them the contract because of the county's bias against nonunion companies. The county countered by arguing the losing bidder's subcontractors were not properly licensed. After a two-year legal dispute, this past summer, the county and the awardee agreed to pay the losing bidder \$5 million to settle the dispute.²⁶⁹

The federal funds ensure the newly widened highway will be sufficiently lined with decorative rocks.

46) Taxpayer Money to Study How College Students Use Mobile Devices for Social Networking – (IN) \$764,825

The National Science Foundation (NSF) awarded over \$760,000 to the University of Notre Dame to study the wireless and social networking habits of college freshmen.²⁷⁰

"Don't college kids have any shame? They'll spill their guts on Facebook before talking to a real-live person,"²⁷¹ commented a press release touting the project. It made no mention of a public policy benefit to the taxpayer-funded research.

Two hundred and fifty participants will receive phones,²⁷² each containing a "lightweight agent that tracks how students use the phones and how they interact digitally with fellow students." The monitoring will include:

- Location data, such as proximity to other participants;
- Digital communications, such as social networking, email or texting;
- Digital marketplace, such as app purchases, usage and music.²⁷³

"We are honored to partner with such a highly respected university on this landmark study," said Sprint CEO Donald Hesse, who happens to be a graduate of Notre Dame.²⁷⁴

47) Marketing for Farms and Restaurants – (VT) \$171,050

Over \$170,000 taxpayer funds will go toward a Farm-to-Table marketing effort and a food hub study in Vermont.²⁷⁵ According to documents supplied by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, "This project will allow the Newport City Renaissance Corporation to provide the necessary outreach to local farms and restaurants located in downtown Newport and amplify cross-promotion that will allow them to enhance and expand their business and develop Newport into a hub for a fresh food network."²⁷⁶

The plan will include developing a website and social media promotional campaign.²⁷⁷ Taxpayers who struggle with directions do not have to worry because the project will also create a "Farm Trail Map" using Newport as the center and connecting the Farm Trail to the

Wine Trail and Eastern Township Trails just over the Canadian border in Quebec's Eastern Townships."²⁷⁸ The funding for this project comes from a USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG),²⁷⁹ which was budgeted to receive \$39 million in FY2011.²⁸⁰

48) Seminar in England Allows Teachers to Retrace Steps of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales – \$136,555

Taxpayers are out \$136,555²⁸¹ for a seminar in England run by Eastern Illinois University and Kent State University. The seminar focuses on Chaucer and his *Canterbury Tales* (read in the original Middle English²⁸²), taking teachers through a four-week journey retracing the famous pilgrimage. The modern-day pilgrims will visit many Chaucer-related and other tourist sites around England, including Westminster Abbey, the British Library, the British Museum, the Tower of London, and many others.²⁸³ The federal funds cover much of the costs associated with the trip, including lodging, use of libraries, internet access, and travel.²⁸⁴



49) Weatherization Program Lets Taxpayer Funds Slip Through the Cracks – (Department of Energy) \$231.3 Million

Numerous reports indicate the Department of Energy's Weatherization Assistance program is riddled with waste and abuse. After issuing a Management Alert about such problems in 2009, the U.S. Department of Energy Inspector General (DOE IG) found the weatherization program suffered from poor workmanship, inflated material costs, and inadequate inspections in 2010.²⁸⁵ The investigation focused on Illinois' weatherization program, which received \$242 million from the U.S. Department of Energy. The report found substandard home assessments, weatherization workmanship, and contractor billing, which "put the entire program at risk."²⁸⁶

In another example, New Jersey was forced to end a \$4 million federally-funded weatherization job training program after a lack of job demand left trainees without prospects – only seven of the 184 aspiring workers that received training found work in the field.²⁸⁷

The program received \$230 million in FY 2011²⁸⁸ through regular appropriations. The program also received an additional \$8.1 billion from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), nearly eight times the normal amount of annual funding for weatherization purposes across all federal programs.²⁸⁹ The DOE IG has described ARRA funding for green energy as "so at odds with the realities on the ground that it was akin to 'attaching a lawn mower to a fire hydrant.'" ²⁹⁰

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has pointed out the program duplicates other federal initiatives, and the deluge of federal funding for energy efficiency could allow states to spend less of their own revenue on such efforts, reducing the net impact of the federal programs.²⁹¹

50) Entrepreneurship Training... in Barbados? – (U.S. Agency for International Development) \$1.35 Million

The federal government has spent trillions of dollars attempting to create new jobs domestically. Despite its lack of success, Washington is now starting to spend millions more to create jobs abroad.



In February 2011, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) announced a \$1.35 million award for an “entrepreneurship initiative” in the small island nation of Barbados,²⁹² a popular resort spot in the Eastern Caribbean.

The grant will pay for the development of curriculum, courses, and faculty at Barbados’ Cave Hill School of Business to teach students how to create and manage entrepreneurial start-ups. The school plans to offer an undergraduate minor degree, a graduate concentration, online certificate programs, internships, mentoring, and business incubators, programs which support the development of startup firms. The main focuses of the courses will be “alternative energy initiatives,” “high-tech ventures,” “social entrepreneurship,” and “cultural entrepreneurship.”²⁹³ The U.S. partner for the Cave Hill School of Business, which will be helping the school develop its programs, is Indiana University’s Kelley School of Business.²⁹⁴

A USAID representative in Barbados explains why the American people should be paying for the program, noting it will “address the challenge of creating new business opportunities in Barbados and its neighboring countries, especially for Caribbean young people.”²⁹⁵

51) Coast Guard Spends Taxpayer Dollars on Mardi Gras Float – (LA) \$24,450

The United States Coast Guard spent more than \$24,000 on a float for the 2011 New Orleans Mardi Gras celebration.²⁹⁶ According to the U.S. Coast Guard's website, "each year the Coast Guard uses its visibility during Mardi Gras festivities to better acquaint the public with their role as America's maritime guardian."²⁹⁷ The Coast Guard also uses the float as a recruiting tool.²⁹⁸

An online video shows the Coast Guard float in action with individuals throwing out beads to partiers on the street.²⁹⁹ It appears from the video, however, on this evening the celebration ended a little earlier for the float as a result of a flat tire.³⁰⁰



52) Study Examines Political Websites and Campaign Strategies – (IL) \$126,242

Several researchers received a combined \$126,242 from the National Science Foundation to archive and study the websites of U.S. congressional candidates.³⁰¹

The project stores versions of campaign websites from nine points in time (each year from 2002 to 2010) and compiles other data on media coverage. The project examines data provided on candidates' backgrounds, districts, and advertisements. Additionally, the investigators will "collect experimental data on campaign effects on voters and survey data that capture the motivations of website designers."³⁰²

This trove of data “has clear intellectual merit” and will contribute to “broad societal knowledge” by increasing our understanding of political campaigns, according to the project’s creators. Researchers will be able to answer questions such as whether candidates “live up to the promises they make during campaigns.”³⁰³ This “enhanced understanding” may be used in the future as “basis for reforms that could improve campaign quality.”³⁰⁴

53) Federal Dollars Pays to Renovate a Carriage House – (UT) \$150,000



Salt Lake City received \$150,000 in taxpayer money to renovate the carriage house to a mansion owned by a turn-of-the-century beer businessman.³⁰⁵

Albert Fisher established the A. Fisher Brewing Company in Salt Lake City in 1884. His enterprise quickly became the largest brewery in Utah, and in 1893 he constructed the Fisher Mansion next to the brewery along the banks of the Jordan River.³⁰⁶

The Fisher Mansion is now “an island among industrial properties,”³⁰⁷ but in 2007 Salt Lake City purchased the property as part of the Jordan River Parkway Trail project.³⁰⁸ The \$150,000 in federal money will only pay for a stabilization effort of the mansion’s stable house, preserving the current structure until a more thorough renovation can be done. Most of the grant will be used to “seismically upgrade the existing structure and refurbish the exterior envelope of the building for weather-tightness and pest control.”³⁰⁹

The city has not yet decided what to do with the building, and the stabilization will preserve the building until “a definitive use of the building is identified.”³¹⁰ In fact, it is unclear if the city has any idea how to use the carriage house since it previously solicited ideas for how to use the Fisher Mansion property, with some suggesting it be used as a revenue-generating private rental.³¹¹

54) Millions Of Federal Transportation Dollars Pay for Covered Bridge Preservation Program – (Department of Transportation) \$8.3 Million

The National Historic Covered Bridge Preservation Program provides grants to repair or rehabilitate covered bridges each year.³¹² In FY 2011, this program received \$8.3 million in federal funding.³¹³ “While some covered bridges are still in use, others have been bypassed in favor of steel bridges. The covered bridges’ main function now is to look scenic and attract tourists,” noted the *Associated Press*.³¹⁴

The bridge benefiting the most from the federal preservation funds in 2011 is the Rock Covered Bridge in Pennsylvania, which received \$1.1 million in renovations. Rock Covered Bridge



Rock Covered Bridge in Pennsylvania received \$1.1 million in federal funds for renovations.

stretches 56 feet in length over Lower Little Swatara Creek and was built in 1870.³¹⁵

Another bridge benefiting from these federal funds is the Larwood Covered Bridge in Oregon. The original bridge on this site no longer exists and was built to support a town settled by the current bridge's namesake, William Larwood. The current bridge, however, was not built until 1939. While the original town is gone, federal funds are being used to rehabilitate the Larwood Covered Bridge as a "reminder[] of the area's previous activities."³¹⁶

Transportation programs, including the National Historic Covered Bridge Preservation Program, and merge them into five separate accounts. Most projects would still be eligible for highway funding, but would have to compete with other highway and bridge projects for funds.³¹⁷

President Barack Obama's budget proposal for 2012 would eliminate 55 Department of

An economist with the Brookings Institution observes, "I love covered bridges, but I don't think it should be a federal responsibility to preserve them."³¹⁸

55) Taxpayer Money Supports Wine Conference, Pavilion, and Education – (CO, SD, and OH) \$62,000

Ten thousand federal dollars will help pay for the 2012 Drink Local Wine Conference in Colorado.³¹⁹ The event will help raise awareness of Colorado wine producers, as the conference hopes to attract the attention of both local and national wine writers.³²⁰ The Drink Local Wine Conference will use a website and social media sites such as Twitter through "Twitter Tastings" to help promote the event. It is anticipated that approximately 100-150 people will attend the event.³²¹ The number of wineries in Colorado has increased twenty-fold in the past two decades.³²² It is unclear why such a thriving industry necessitates federal funds to promote its products.

Additionally, nearly \$40,000 in federal dollars will also be used to showcase the fine wines of South Dakota. The money will fund a Wine Pavilion at the South Dakota State Fair to raise awareness about local wines.³²³ According to the grant information, the project will help fairgoers choose a bottle of wine by "allowing consumers to taste the wine before they buy,

helping create a brand identity for South Dakota's wineries, and showcasing food pairings along with the wines."³²⁴ It is estimated that 75 percent of attendees will learn more about South Dakota wines.³²⁵



The Wine Pavilion will have tasting packages available for purchase that include samples of over 40 varieties of South Dakota wine and beer. "Wine-a-ritas," described as "a refreshing blend of wine and margarita mix," will also be available.³²⁶

Another \$15,000 in federal funds will help raise awareness and educate Ohio residents about the grape industry in the Buckeye State. The Ohio Wine Producers Association will create a marketing campaign that promotes Ohio grapes and wine.³²⁷ Some of the money will be used to create videos highlighting Ohio grapes on the Ohio Wine Producers Association YouTube Channel.³²⁸ Additionally, the grant states that "[a] trivia-style board game and visitation booklet will also be designed and distributed to wineries in southern Ohio to educate existing consumers."³²⁹

The project will also create a campaign aimed specifically at Ohio school children. According to the funding notification, the "project staff will develop and distribute a children's storybook that focuses efforts to educate second graders about the cultivation and harvest of Ohio grown grapes as well as the production of grape juice."³³⁰

56) The Federal Government's Own Version of "Farmville" to Combat Obesity, Teach Nutrition – (CA) \$206,214

Researchers at the University of Southern California received \$206,214 in 2011 to develop and evaluate "Virtual Sprouts: Web-Based Gardening Games."³³¹ The project is intended to be an "interactive and simulation version of the First Lady's Organic Garden in a game-based

environment.”³³² The game’s purpose is to “revolutionize [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math] education on obesity, promote healthy food choices and decrease obesity rates.”³³³ The researchers are targeting the game toward low-income and minority populations in Los Angeles. The game will be web-based and used in USC’s family of elementary schools. It will be loaded onto kiosks in three community clinics around Los Angeles and used at the California Science Center.

Gardening may be a valuable tool in teaching children the value of healthy nutrition and physical activity. To that end, USC has already developed what the researchers say is a successful “LA Sprouts” gardening curriculum.³³⁴ A web-based gardening video game is not a wise use of American taxpayer dollars in a situation where alternatives with proven success are available.

57) Stimulus Funds for a Tree Census – (NV) \$60,000

Sixty thousand dollars in federal funds paid for a tree survey and inventory in Henderson, Nevada.³³⁵ A local newspaper reported, “Of the 15,000 documented trees on city parks, many have no recorded data other than a GPS location.”³³⁶ In total, the community of Henderson has over 1,348 acres of ‘undocumented tree assets.’³³⁷ The project will specifically include “tree location mapping, species identification, tree health evaluation, and maintenance prioritization.”³³⁸

The goal of the project is to develop a “comprehensive tree maintenance plan” and to develop general data that “can be used to generate support” for the city’s forestry program.³³⁹ The city argues that the reason why federal funds were necessary was because the city didn’t have the money to train the city workers and volunteers on how to conduct the inventory.”³⁴⁰

While it is unclear that any new jobs were created from these funds, \$1,200 was budgeted from the stimulus grant for city employees to go to a national urban forestry conference.³⁴¹ With Nevada’s struggling economy, perhaps helping the unemployed in the state would be a better place to spend the stimulus money than a tree census.

58) Duplicative Occupational Safety Program Lacks Long-term Strategic Planning – (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) \$22.04 Million

In the FY 2012 budget, the administration proposes the elimination of the Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing Program (AFF) within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) because the program’s activities are not central to the CDC’s mission and are duplicative of other programs at the Department of Labor and Department of Agriculture.³⁴²

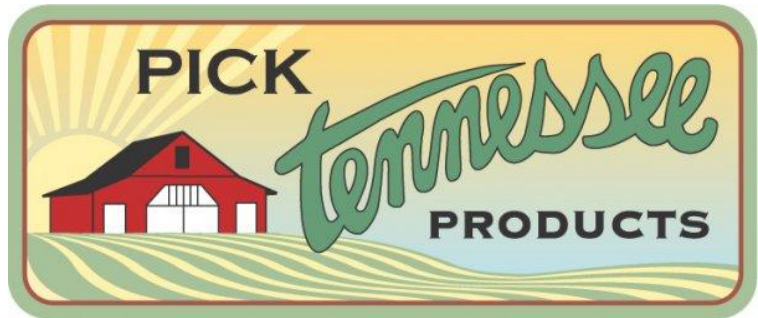
The stated goals of AFF are “reductions in workplace illnesses, injuries, fatalities, and/or hazardous exposures” in the Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing sectors.³⁴³

However, the FY 2012 budget notes a National Academies study that concluded that “there was little evidence that the research activities, outputs, and intermediate outcomes contributed to the stated end outcomes of reducing workplace injury and illness.”³⁴⁴

The President’s budget also notes that program evaluations have shown that CDC’s work in this area has lacked a cohesive vision, consistent leadership, and long-term strategy planning.³⁴⁵ In fiscal year 2011, this program received over \$22 million in federal funding.³⁴⁶

59) Creating a Smart Phone App for Picking Tennessee Farmers – (TN) \$181,966

Yes, there’s an app for that, too. The Tennessee Department of Agriculture received \$181,966 in taxpayer dollars to create an app for smart phones and tablets to help connect consumers with specialty crop producers.³⁴⁷ The marketing campaign is designed to help further its *Pick Tennessee Products* campaign and to help “consumers find farmers through the online specialty crop directory.”³⁴⁸



Pick Tennessee Products is a program aimed squarely at Tennessee residents in the hopes they will shop locally at Tennessee farms. The program’s website, which can already be accessed by any smart phone, allows an individual to browse the program’s listings and even order products online. Those so interested can also find the program on Facebook and Twitter (@PickTnProducts), which provide access to social networks free of charge.

In addition, the program allows anyone to aim their smart phone at “quick response” (QR) codes, which when instantly launches the program website on the phone. According to one report, “Once the code has done its job, shoppers can instantly access all the local farm-direct ingredients, artisan foods, gift baskets, and even Christmas trees listed at www.picktnproducts.org.”³⁴⁹



While having even more avenues to access the program’s website may be useful, it is hardly a pressing need. The app is intended to even further increase awareness about the variety of Tennessee agricultural products. Supporters hope that in the “first six months of the App being used, it will be downloaded 10,000 times and 30,000 times within the first year.”³⁵⁰

60) Study: How Effective Are European Union Parliamentarians at Framing Legislative Debates? – (VA) \$300,000

In recent months the European Union has faced its toughest test ever, facing down the possibility of its own collapse and an ensuing economic disaster. Several researchers in the U.S., however, will be looking to understand how it is that EU leaders debate with one another.

On August 15, 2011, University of Virginia professor Christine Mahoney was awarded \$300,000 from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to study how European Union leaders frame their legislative debates to gain advantage.³⁵¹ Mahoney's study will measure how the language and content of proposed legislation changes over time, including before its official introduction as a bill in the EU. The study will attempt to examine how a variety of competing influences in EU debates, including various lobbying groups who publish related papers, affects the evolution of draft legislation.³⁵²

To these ends, the project seeks to quantify legislative framing techniques in European countries “by initiating a large and rigorous automated content analysis study of political argumentation focused on the European Union.”³⁵³ Researchers will compile text of political debates and utilize software to analyze changes in 100 pieces of EU legislation.³⁵⁴

Data from the teams involved will be made public on a website for other researchers.

How is this project a priority when we are running annual deficits exceeding \$1 trillion?



61) Growing Massachusetts Video Game Industry – (MA) \$100,000

The Massachusetts Digital Games Institute (MassDiGI) University Center at Becker College, described as the new promotional arm for the states video game industry,³⁵⁵ was awarded \$100,000 in federal money to help support the industry by developing intellectual property for games, helping businesses get access to capital.³⁵⁶

Without the Institute, some graduates of Becker College have already started their own gaming companies. One graduate recently started a company called Turtle Boy Games and hopes to develop a game where one day video game enthusiasts will be able create virtual forests where they can manage and cultivate virtual forests from their laptops.³⁵⁷

It is unclear why an industry worth \$2 billion in the state would need government aid to further develop.³⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the money has been approved thanks to the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA). Over the next five years, Becker College is expected to receive up to \$500,000 from the EDA for this initiative.³⁵⁹

62) Duplicative Engine Program for F-35 Fighter – (Department of Defense) \$207 Million

In April, the Pentagon finally cancelled development of a second engine design for its next-generation F-35 fighter plane, after years of escalating criticism that developing two different designs was wasteful because only one would ultimately be used.

In total, the cancelled engine design cost taxpayers \$3 billion, including roughly \$200 million in fiscal year 2011, more than a million dollars a day.³⁶⁰ In its announcement cancelling the duplicative engine project, which was led by General Electric and Rolls Royce, the Pentagon called the project “unneeded and wasteful.”³⁶¹

The wasteful engine project was just a small fraction of the total F-35 development budget, which is the single largest acquisition project in the history of humankind.

The development costs alone for the new fighter are estimated to be over \$56 billion by 2018. That's a sharp increase from its initial projected cost, in 2001, of \$34 billion, according to a review by the Government Accountability Office (GAO).³⁶² According to GAO, the total cost to develop and acquire the planes has ballooned over the past decade from \$233 billion to over \$382 billion, while the number of planes the Pentagon will receive has dropped from over 2,800 to fewer than 2,500.³⁶³

While several Members of Congress representing areas where the second engine was designed and built argued that having the Pentagon buy two engines would promote competition, then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said simply that “a situation where both competitors are guaranteed a win is not a competition at all.”³⁶⁴

63) Study on Jordanian Student Hookah Smoking – (VA) \$55,382

Over the past three years, the National Institute of Health's Fogarty International Center has awarded a Virginia Commonwealth University researcher nearly \$170,000 to study changes in hookah smoking habits and beliefs of university students in Jordan including over \$50,000 in FY 2011.³⁶⁵ The researcher studied the “associations between sociodemographic variables and water pipe tobacco smoking” in Jordan.³⁶⁶

While this research answers the question “how many Jordanian students believe that water pipe tobacco smoking is more harmful than cigarettes smoking?” (answer: 62.2 percent),³⁶⁷ the

study also begs the question, “is there anything that the federal government will not spend American taxpayer dollars on?” (answer: it appears not).

64) Taxpayer-Funded Snow Cones for Emergencies (and Promotions) – \$6,279³⁶⁸

Department of Homeland Security funding was used to purchase thirteen Snow Cone ice-making machines for 13 counties across Michigan in support of emergency management and the Citizen Corps program.³⁶⁹ Each machine cost \$480. According to the Michigan state government, the Snow Cone ice-making machines were intended to assist with treating heat exhaustion and other illnesses during large events (including possible terrorist incidents or similar emergencies).³⁷⁰ They were also purchased for public outreach at events to encourage people to volunteer in Michigan’s Citizen’s Corp program.³⁷¹



65) Farmers Market Advertising Campaign – (OK) \$93,000

Over \$90,000 in federal funding will go toward the “continuation of a state-wide advertising campaign, which will provide funding to local farmers markets for specialty crop promotional activities, OK Grown tote bags, and other advertisements.”³⁷² The money will also help cover the costs associated with signs, marketing items, advertising for local specialty crops, and a newsletter.³⁷³ Federal funding has gone toward several similar promotional campaigns in Oklahoma over the last several fiscal years.³⁷⁴

The number of farmers markets over the past two decades has exploded, increasing by 16 percent just last year and more than doubling since 2000.³⁷⁵ There are now over 6,000 farmers’ markets nationwide.³⁷⁶ In light of the robust success these enterprises are enjoying, it is questionable why federal assistance for farmers’ markets is even needed. Nevertheless, not only does the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program continue to fund farmers’ markets, but there are at least four other federal programs that offer support for the development of farmers’ markets.³⁷⁷

In total, the Oklahoma Agriculture Department received \$380,851 through the United States Department of Agriculture’s Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. Other Oklahoma projects being funded include: (1) an evaluation of colored shade cloths on vegetable production to lengthen the growing season; (2) educating children on the benefits of specialty crops; and (3) to determining the economic impact of the wine industry in Oklahoma.³⁷⁸

66) Dancing With the Stars – (MD) \$300,000

Understanding how matter came to be in the universe is a difficult subject. Fortunately, the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange received \$300,000 from the National Science Foundation to teach the public about the origins of matter through a unique performance experience, “The Matter of Origins.” The group produced a two-part “experimental program” that it performed at universities.³⁷⁹

The first part of the program was a “dance performance illuminated by video and vivid soundscape.” The dance was intended to explore not only the beginning of matter, but also its physics.

After that enlightening experience, the audience engaged in a “facilitated dialogue” with “scientists, historians, philosophers, and religious leaders” to discuss the origin of matter. Their conversation was in an “immersive environment that incorporate[d] dance, projected images, and provocative questions.”³⁸⁰

“Whether this part worked or not depends on how much you enjoy chatting about the bomb with strangers in a large noisy room with no alcohol,” wrote the Washington Post in its review of the group’s performance at the University of Maryland. “But,” the critic noted, “the cake was divine.”³⁸¹

The New York Times panned both the cake and the discussion. While the dessert was “uninspiring,” the “artificially induced conversation (at my table, anyway) was worse, studded with questions like, “So, origins, the origins of the universe — what do you know about that?”³⁸²



The National Science Foundation spent \$300,000 for this dance performance to “facilitate dialogue” on the physics and the origins of the universe.

67) US Taxpayer Funds Survey of Well-Being in 120 Countries – (CA) \$610,908

Different countries have different opinions about what constitutes being well-off and feeling happy. The National Institute on Aging provided over \$600,000 to the researchers at the Rand Corporation in 2011 to conduct a worldwide survey of well-being.³⁸³ They will use a “vignette methodology that allows identification of response scale differences within and between countries.”³⁸⁴ The survey will present participants with hypothetical situations concerning income, family relations, job, and health.³⁸⁵ The grant will continue for five years.

Researchers justify this use of taxpayer dollars by saying, “It is important to know the determinants of life satisfaction and well-being across nations of the world.”³⁸⁶

Given that other organizations like Gallup already conduct worldwide polls of people’s well-being,³⁸⁷ the added-value created by this survey may be minimal. Perhaps Congress should instead poll taxpayers to see if they are happy with their tax dollars being used to study how happy people in other countries are.

68) Taxpayer Dollars Will Help Create “Farm Art D-Tour” – (WI) \$50,000

Wormfarm Institute of Reedsburg, Wisconsin, received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts³⁸⁸ that will help it create a 50-mile self-guided tour through farmland to help promote art and agriculture in rural Wisconsin.³⁸⁹ The D-Tour features “land based art installations, artist-built Roadside Culture Stands, Field Notes (rural education sites), and outdoor performances through the landscape that is itself a cultural resource,” along rural roads in northern Sauk County, Wisconsin. The art will feature farm-based projects and performances; artist designed and built mobile farm stands; and interpretive signage about rural culture and the local arts, food, and farming communities.³⁹⁰

Wormfarm Institute Executive Director Donna Neuwirth praises the program and says that “after all, the word ‘culture’ is embedded in agriculture.”³⁹¹

69) Duplicative Subsidy Program for High-Risk Research – (Technology Innovation Program) \$44.9 Million

When a wasteful program changes its name, you know it is in trouble. In 2007, the Advanced Technology Program (ATP) was replaced by the Technology Innovation Program (TIP), a grant program “designed to support, promote, and accelerate innovation in the United States through high-risk, high-reward research in areas of critical national need.”³⁹² TIP received nearly \$45 million in federal funding in fiscal year 2011.³⁹³

Prior to the name change, ATP provided assistance to dozens of Fortune 500 companies, including hundreds of millions in funding to IBM, General Electric, General Motors, 3M, Motorola, and others.³⁹⁴ Although the replacement program has been restructured so only small and medium businesses are eligible, both programs are targeted at subsidizing high-risk research.³⁹⁵

At the same time, critics argue that basic economics dictates against government funding of this type of research. If these projects were truly as profitable as promised, the private sector would use its own funding to support the research and development of these programs. Not surprisingly, only about one-third of the projects financed by the ATP program made it to market.³⁹⁶

The president's 2009 budget recommended terminating the program, noting that despite the reorganization, "it will still provide subsidies for activities that private industry has the means and incentive to support."³⁹⁷

TIP also duplicates other federal programs that fund research and development including the Small Business Innovative Program (SBIR),³⁹⁸ the Research and Technology Development grant program,³⁹⁹ and the Office of Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research within the National Science Foundation.⁴⁰⁰

Taxpayers are taking enough of a risk giving their money to Congress every year to spend—they do not need a program that intentionally spends their money on risky investments.

70) New York Dance Troupe Gets Money for Trip to Indonesia – (NY) \$30,000

In September 2011, the U.S. Department of State awarded New York City's Battery Dance Company \$30,000 in taxpayer money to send eight members of the dance company on a weeklong trip to Indonesia. The groups' activities will include performances and workshops.⁴⁰¹

According to its website, the Battery Dance Company has, "harbored an interest in Indonesia for many years, having presented Balinese dance at its own Downtown Dance."⁴⁰² The company has performed on world's stages, teaches, presents, and advocates for the field of dance, and is dedicated to the pursuit of artistic excellence.⁴⁰³

Approximately \$24,000 of the grant paid for travel to Indonesia. The remaining \$6,000 went to insurance, promotional materials and other expenses.⁴⁰⁴



71) Analyzing the Spread of Political Info on the Web – (VA) \$500,000

Maintaining a positive public image is important for any elected official or government agency. One way to do that is to do good, efficient work that serves the taxpayers and voters for whom you work. Another way is to obsess over your image.

For those who choose the second path, there are many consultants and tools to help you. One such consultant is OhMyGov, an Alexandria-based firm who, for several hundred dollars a month, will help you track your online image, count and track your Twitter and Facebook following, aggregate your mentions in news stories, and more.⁴⁰⁵

Obsessing over one's public image isn't new, but apparently the National Science Foundation believed OhMyGov gives it a fresh approach. In 2011, NSF awarded the firm \$500,000 to do its groundbreaking work, helping clients "uncover paradigms in data dissemination, find new ways to influence information dissemination. . . [and] root out sources of erroneous information online."⁴⁰⁶

It's not clear what public benefit arises from the NSF grant, which appears primarily to benefit those in positions of power by helping them maintain and enhance their images. Nor is it clear why NSF has used taxpayer dollars to improve the business outlook for this company, which now has special privileges in government contracting because of its grantee status. If OhMyGov's product is useful to its clients, the company should be able to market itself without a handout from taxpayers.

72) Energy Program Repeatedly Slated for Termination Continues to get Funding (U.S. Department of Agriculture) \$11.976 Million

Nearly \$12 million was spent in 2011 on an energy assistance program that both the current and former administrations agree should not even exist.

The USDA High Energy Cost Grant program provides grants for low cost electricity to rural areas. However, only Alaska, Hawaii, and a small number of additional remote regions in the continental United States qualify for them, leaving other states out in the cold.

Both the Bush and Obama Administrations have targeted the USDA High Energy Cost Grant program for elimination "because it is duplicative of, and less effective than, the Rural Utilities Service's (RUS) Electric Loan Program."⁴⁰⁷

In 2011, one of the program's largest recipients was Sacred Power Corporation, which was awarded \$2.8 million for work in South Dakota, Arizona, New Mexico and Utah.⁴⁰⁸ Sacred Power is a small \$8.6 million company, but is involved in telecommunications, the production of solar cells, livestock watering and solar energy training. The company's owner, Dave Melton, a major NASCAR fan,⁴⁰⁹ recently founded Sacred Power Motorsports to advertise the company,

which sponsored a car in 2010 and⁴¹⁰ a truck in 2011 driven by A.J. Russell. Melton calls the foray into NASCAR “extreme marketing,” which is true considering such sponsorships can run in the millions of dollars.⁴¹¹ Because the team is Native American-owned, the team’s manager believes it has “a lot of opportunities to get sponsorships with companies connected to the casinos.”⁴¹²

Another large grant award was given to Gwitchyaa Zhee Utility Company, which received \$3.5 million⁴¹³ to help construct a new heat and power facility to run on wood biomass.⁴¹⁴ The facility will be built in Fort Yukon, Alaska, which currently has a population of 583 and is heated by a facility that uses more expensive oil. If the money were instead divided evenly among the town’s 243 households, it would provide each with more than \$14,400. In Fort Yukon, where the average monthly cost of rent and utilities for the majority of households is \$390,⁴¹⁵ this would cover everyone’s expenses for 37 years.

For those concerned about the environmental impact of the program, additional concerns have surfaced. President Obama’s budget notes, “the way the program is currently designed, the bulk of the funding directly supports fossil fuel activities,” which the administration does not relish subsidizing.⁴¹⁶ In FY 2011, the program received nearly \$12 million in federal funding.⁴¹⁷

73) Federal Agency Spends Pretty Penny on 50th Anniversary Commemoration – (U.S. Agency of International Development) \$156,273

It appears one federal agency knows how to throw a party. In other countries. On the taxpayer’s dime.

The United States Agency of International Development (USAID) spent at least \$156,000 in eight countries celebrating their 50th anniversary. The funds were used for events ranging from videos to receptions to school painting competitions. The commemoration events occurred in Afghanistan, Albania, Bosnia/Herzegovina, East Africa, El Salvador, Kosovo, Philippines, and South Africa.⁴¹⁸

Commemoration events in the Philippines cost a total of \$97,000 and included a reception, videos, a school painting competition, and a presentation on environmental awareness. In East Africa, \$12,000 was spent on dinner, banners, and a USAID-branded folder.⁴¹⁹

74) Program for Repairing Poor Families’ Houses Will Mainly Serve Property Developers – (Department of Agriculture) \$14.97 Million

At a cost of nearly \$15 million,⁴²⁰ the Multi-Family Housing Revitalization Program was intended to help repair the homes of low-income families. The primary beneficiaries of the program, however, have become the developers of the properties rather than the families that live in them, according to government documents.⁴²¹ The President’s budget recommended

terminating the program, noting that adequate funding has already been supplied for most “cost-effective and justified” repairs, and “at this point, additional funding in the demonstration program could be seen as over-subsidizing the multifamily housing property owners.”⁴²²

75) Federal Grant Pays to Package Grass-fed Cow Butter – (NY) \$55,660

Kriemhild Dairy Farms was awarded over \$55,000 to purchase and install a new butter packing machine, allowing it to begin offering 8-ounce packages of their “Meadow Butter” made from the milk of their grass-fed cows.⁴²³ Previously Kriemhild had only offered 2 to 10 pound packages, so the new “butter filler” machine will allow them to begin selling more of their product to individuals.⁴²⁴

“We use more sweet cream so the butter has a higher fat content, typically over 85%,” the Farms’ website explains. “The higher fat content is coveted by chefs for its unique cooking properties. The butter is made throughout the growing season while our cows are grazing on high quality pastures. Since our cows graze seasonally you’ll see a richer color.”⁴²⁵

The grant was awarded through the Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) program,⁴²⁶ which was given \$34,930,000 in funding for FY 2011.⁴²⁷

The farm has received a similar 2010 grant from the United States Department of Agriculture to complete a business plan for “Meadow Butter,” a grass-based butter product, and to pay for packaging and a logo.⁴²⁸

76) Taxpayer Money Helps Pay for International Film Festival – (CA) \$50,000

The San Francisco International Film Festival (SFiFF) received a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant worth \$50,000 to help showcase its more than 250 international films.⁴²⁹ Started in 1957, the SFiFF is the longest running film festival in the Americas with recent annual attendance of more than 80,000.⁴³⁰ The San Francisco Film Society (SFFS) runs the festival and is supported by numerous corporate sponsors.⁴³¹ In fact, non-federal funding for the festival is \$2,179,600,⁴³² calling into question why a federal contribution was needed at all. The San Francisco International Film Festival was just one of the 49 grants, totaling \$1.49 million, that were awarded through the Access to Artistic Excellence program.⁴³³ Film festivals in Chicago, Cleveland, Palm Springs, Seattle, and Washington also received grants.⁴³⁴



77) Chemistry Theater for Children – (WI) \$499,993

Broadway plays aren't the only performances for the theater. The American taxpayer through the National Science Foundation is funding the "Fusion Science Theater National Training and Dissemination Program" with \$500,000 to create science investigation plays for children.⁴³⁵ The program also aims to teach undergraduate students and educators how to perform a "FST Science Investigation" show. Chemistry and physics topics are the program's focus.

In one of FST's shows called "The Boiling Point," a teacher and a mime assistant lead an interactive investigation into what happens to water molecules when water boils.⁴³⁶ Another one of FST's shows, "The Amazing Chemical Circus," involves a "stage play, demonstration show, and creative dynamics" to teach children about various chemical reactions, like those that form polymers.⁴³⁷

Undergraduate students and educators who pay to go through training for the program receive "videos, scripts, rehearsal schedules, and training exercises."⁴³⁸ The FST organization also runs an online forum that trainees can use to experiment with the design and follow up with one another.⁴³⁹

With their \$500,000 in grants from NSF alone, FST's organizers expect to reach only 2,500 children and professionals during the lifetime of the grant, which lasts two years.⁴⁴⁰

According to GAO, in FY2004, the federal government was spending \$2.8 billion to fund over 200 programs to encourage "science, technology, engineering, and math" (STEM) programs.⁴⁴¹ Chemistry Theater for Children may be one project that taxpayers and students can do without.

78) Duplicative Grant Programs Available For Retrofitting Or Replacing Diesel Engines Despite Declining Need For the Modifications – (Environmental Protection Agency) \$49.9 Million

President Obama's FY 2012 budget recommended eliminating the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA) grant program, which received nearly \$50 million in federal funding in FY 2011.⁴⁴² The grants are "designed to help States and localities reduce emissions from diesel engines by retrofitting or replacing older, more polluting diesel engines."⁴⁴³ According to the President, the marginal benefit of these individual retrofits is small at this point.⁴⁴⁴ Additionally, since 2007 new diesel engines have had to comply with much higher emission standards, so there is a decreasing need for retrofits in the first place. Indeed, the administration makes clear that "[h]aving achieved its short term objective to remove or retrofit the oldest and dirtiest engines, in the longer term any additional emissions reductions will occur even without DERA funding, as the inventory of existing engines turns over and new cleaner engines become the norm."⁴⁴⁵

President Obama's budget also highlights how there is other funding available for such retrofits through the Department of Transportation's Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality

Improvement program (about \$45 million for diesel retrofits annually) and EPA's Supplemental Environmental Project enforcement agreements (\$7.1 million in diesel emission reduction projects).⁴⁴⁶

79) Air Force Academy Builds "Stonehenge-like Worship Center" – (CO) \$51,474

The Air Force Academy completed construction and dedication of a \$51,474⁴⁴⁷ outdoor worship center in 2011.⁴⁴⁸ It has been described as "a small Stonehenge-like circle of boulders with [a] propane fire pit."⁴⁴⁹



The worship center is "for the handful of current or future cadets whose religions fall under the broad category of 'Earth-based,'" which includes Wiccans, druids and pagans.⁴⁵⁰ Three students out of 4,300 students self-reported as currently having an "earth-based" religion.⁴⁵¹

A 21-year-old senior at the academy, who is a practicing Pagan, said, "It is very nice to have our own space."

The American people support religious freedom, but this investment challenges their faith in government to ever make smart budget choices.

80) Study to Tell India How to Improve its Local Government – (MA) \$425,642

More than \$400,000 paid for a study on how local politicians in India through better communications can improve as elected officials. With record-low approval ratings for U.S. lawmakers, it is unclear why taxpayers are paying for this type of project in another country.

The National Science Foundation awarded \$425,642 to research the effects of providing information to citizens on the performance record of local lawmakers. The investigators will follow citizens and officials in Dehli for two years, seeking to measure how much of an impact the dissemination of information among the citizens has on the decisions and performance of local officials.⁴⁵²

It is unclear, however, why India, one of largest nations in the world, would be interested in taking instructions from the United States on how to improve its political culture.

India is the world's fifth-largest economy,⁴⁵³ and is accumulating wealth at one the fastest rates in the world. Some reports estimate India's economy will overtake the U.S. by mid-century.⁴⁵⁴ It is also unclear why the United States is paying for research on a country that owns \$40 billion of our national debt, making them one of the major foreign holders of U.S. Treasury securities.⁴⁵⁵ Strangely, India is also a significant beneficiary of U.S. foreign aid, receiving over \$126 million in health, economic, and security assistance last year.⁴⁵⁶



81) Exhibit on the History of Rivers, Trails, Railroads, and Roads – (MO) \$300,000

Three hundred thousand dollars in federal money will pay for a new exhibit on the history of transportation at a local museum in Missouri.⁴⁵⁷ The display at the St. Charles County Heritage museum will explain the influence of rivers, railroads, roads, and trails in the region over the years.⁴⁵⁸ The grant application highlights how “[t]he County and its residents have had to rely on multiple forms of transportation and as technology changed, the area had to adapt to the changing transportation methods/patterns.”⁴⁵⁹

With the federal deficit exceeding \$1.3 trillion this year, not everyone in the community agrees the federal government should fund this type of project. A county executive said, “It’s the kind of thing the federal government can’t afford to do.”⁴⁶⁰ But he further acknowledged, “It’s out there and available so we applied for it.”

82) Sixteen Professors to Attend 5-Week Seminar in Rome – \$159,865

A handful of academics spent their summer in Rome on the taxpayer dime. A National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) program allows university and college professors the opportunity to participate in a 5-week summer seminar in Italy titled, “Communication, Empire, and the City of Rome” with the American Academy in Rome.⁴⁶¹ These seminars allow for numerous visits to historic destinations. The faculty members will participate in site visits to the Roman Fora, the Tiber granaries, the Vatican, and a number of museums.⁴⁶²

“The seminar lasts for five weeks,” the Academy websites explains, “to allow participants extended opportunity to acclimatize and to pursue their independent projects.” One of the purposes of the next year’s excursion is to create an “intellectual community among all participants....not just in site visits and seminar discussions, but also in more informal settings such as dinner in the Academy courtyard.”⁴⁶³



Each academic receives a stipend of \$3,900 for the trip prior to departure. Rome is an expensive city so additional funds may be needed for “special meals, souvenirs, books, and emergencies. A few hundred dollars should suffice, depending upon your lifestyle.”⁴⁶⁴ Funding for the 2012 seminar totals \$159,865.⁴⁶⁵

83) Duplicative Rail Line Relocation Program Continues to Receive Taxpayer Money – (Department of Transportation) \$10.5 Million

In FY 2011, the Rail Line Relocation Program received \$10.5 million in federal funding⁴⁶⁶ even though President Obama recommended terminating the program multiple times.⁴⁶⁷ The program provides financial assistance for local rail line relocation and improvement projects.⁴⁶⁸ President Obama proposed eliminating the initiative because it duplicates several programs, including the Railway-Highway Crossings program, which focuses on safety improvements of rail lines and accomplishes many of the same goals.⁴⁶⁹ The Obama administration also noted, “To the extent that the rail line relocation program is aimed at other goals such as community development, more appropriate programs such as Community Development Block Grant are available to States.”⁴⁷⁰

84) U.S. Taxpayer Money Pays for European Student's Leadership Skills – (Department of State) \$306,000

Over \$300,000 in U.S. taxpayer money paid for an initiative called Summer Institutes for European Student Leaders. This funding allows high school and college students from Denmark, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom to come to the U.S. at U.S. taxpayer expense to learn about civic activism and environmental leadership at American colleges.⁴⁷¹

According to the grant announcement, the “program should include group discussions, trainings, and exercises that focus on topics such as leadership, teambuilding, collective problem-solving skills, effective communication, and management skills for diverse organizational settings.”⁴⁷²

85) Study of Online Dating – (NY) \$606,000

The Internet is not only a place of news and information, but it is also used for finding friendship, romance, and other activities. Researchers at Columbia University received over \$600,000 to study how heterosexuals use the internet to meet one another, and how that activity influences their sexual behavior.⁴⁷³ The researchers explain that “using the Internet [sp] for sexual pursuits may shape sexual behavior, including risk taking, remains a very poorly understood phenomenon, especially among heterosexuals.”⁴⁷⁴

They will examine how an online relationship develops into a sexual one, including how each partner makes him- or herself appealing online.⁴⁷⁵ For example, people may lie or embellish features to attract another person to a sexual encounter. Researchers will also look at whether using the internet for other sexual activities leads a heterosexual person to sexual risk-taking.⁴⁷⁶



86) The Treehouse Museum Spends Taxpayer Dollars to Teach the Art of Puppetry – (UT) \$ 74,470

The Treehouse Museum in Ogden, Utah received a \$74,000 federal grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, in part, to encourage youngsters to learn the art of puppetry.⁴⁷⁷

According to the grant summary, the federal funds will be used to finance a variety of theater arts programs, including providing the “opportunity for young teenagers to work with an internationally acclaimed puppeteer to produce three puppet programs for family audiences.”

Museum staff will develop four “ParticPlays” for elementary students to making field trips to the museum.⁴⁷⁸ The goal of this project is to ensure that “participants develop leadership and communications skills as they learn techniques in storytelling and puppetry.”⁴⁷⁹ This grants marks the sixth time The Treehouse Museum has received a grant through this program.⁴⁸⁰

The Treehouse was chosen from 481 applicants that were competing for 160 grants. In total, the Institute of Museum and Library Services distributed \$18,777,552 to fund these types of programs across the country.⁴⁸¹

87) Economic Development Program is Duplicative and Has Unclear Benefits – (Appalachian Regional Commission) \$68 Million

Economic development is one of the most poorly-coordinated mission areas of the federal government. In 2011, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that there are currently over 80 programs, spread across four agencies, which are intended to promote economic growth.⁴⁸²

One such duplicative entity is the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), which received approximately \$68 million in FY 2011.⁴⁸³ ARC was created by Congress in 1965 “to bring the 13 Appalachian states into the mainstream of the American economy.”⁴⁸⁴ The 13 states are Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.⁴⁸⁵

Several groups have identified the commission as a candidate for elimination, including the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform,⁴⁸⁶ the Congressional Budget Office (CBO),⁴⁸⁷ and a report by Citizens against Government Waste.⁴⁸⁸

As the CBO points out, it is unclear whether the commission is having any benefit. ARC, and two other entities, are all “intended, among other things, to create jobs, improve rural education and health care, develop utilities and other infrastructure, and provide job training. However, it is difficult to assess whether such outcomes can be attributed to those programs rather than to the work of other governmental and nongovernmental organizations or to market forces and the effects of general economic conditions.”⁴⁸⁹ One recent ARC grant whose economic benefit was certainly questionable was \$108,211 for the “Adventure to Space” program at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center for teacher field trips.⁴⁹⁰

88) Does Tweeting and Friending Make You Happy? – (CA) \$198,195

Do social media programs such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace make you happy? Two researchers were awarded a hefty sum of taxpayer dollars to find out.⁴⁹¹ University of California-Riverside received a \$198,000 federal grant in 2011 from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to study “motivations, expectations and goal pursuit in social media.”⁴⁹²

The researchers plan to survey thousands of social media users with the help of an “e-Lab” consisting of an international online community of MySpace and Twitters users.⁴⁹³ One aspect of their research seeks to determine whether happy people or sad people use social media more. “Do unhappy people spend more time on Twitter or Facebook?” is likely to be among the questions most researched,” according to one media report.⁴⁹⁴

The highly respected Pew Research Center Internet and American Life Project may have already beaten these researchers to the punch, however, with a slew of recently released studies. One released on November 9, 2011, found that “more teens report positive personal outcomes than negative ones from interactions on social network sites.”⁴⁹⁵ Another from November 15 surveyed 2,277 people about their use of Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and LinkedIn, and found that 66 percent of adults use the sites, primarily to keep up with friends and family.⁴⁹⁶ A final study, released December 2, 2011, found that 53 percent of adults aged 18-29 “go online for no particular reason except to have fun or to pass the time.”⁴⁹⁷

Researchers say they also hope to determine how social media affects mental health and physical relationships. This grant expires August 31, 2013,⁴⁹⁸ and according to the researchers was awarded for two years and will total \$413,756.⁴⁹⁹

89) Love Ballad Sticker Shock – (Maldives) \$25,000

Taxpayers are spending \$25,000 to transcribe a traditional love ballad from the Maldives Islands.

In October 2011, the United States awarded \$25,000 to fund a project⁵⁰⁰ that would transcribe the traditional love ballad known as the “Buruni Ballad.”⁵⁰¹ The six-hour love ballad, “Buruni Kamana Raivaru,” is considered the Maldives very own version of “Romeo and Juliet.”⁵⁰²

The tragic love story “is set against a background of magic, jealousy and revenge” then after rejecting the advances of the king, “the heroine Dhon Hiyala and her lower-class lover Alifulhu are forced to commit suicide by jumping onto a giant, poisonous jelly fish.”⁵⁰³

During the course of the next five months, a team will produce the first digital recording, transcript, and video of the love ballad. Supporters view the traditional love story as a guide to the cultural history of the Maldives.⁵⁰⁴

The US Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation has supported over 640 cultural heritage preservation projects in more than 100 countries for the past 11 years; the organization has donated around \$26 million for such projects.⁵⁰⁵

90) Botched Assistance for Families of Afghan War Victims – \$15 Million⁵⁰⁶

Since 2007, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has spent over \$52 million – \$45 million in the last three years⁵⁰⁷ – on a program intended to help families of civilians killed as a result of military operations against insurgents and the Taliban.⁵⁰⁸ The aid, which is not meant to be compensation⁵⁰⁹ for the family's loss, can include things like food, blankets, a tractor or other equipment.⁵¹⁰ Tragically, repeated reviews of the program have found it riddled with terrible waste, fraud and abuse.

In 2009, USAID's Inspector General (IG) all but called the program a failure, concluding that while it had helped some families, it was “not on target to achieve its main goal,” it was failing to reach most eligible recipients, and that USAID had dropped the ball in monitoring and overseeing the effort.⁵¹¹

In a November 2011 report, the IG revealed harsher findings. Touring the programs' warehouses where USAID assistance was being housed, inspectors found “an overpowering smell of rodents” and even “rat feces inside of bags of food,” the very food intended for distribution to grieving Afghan families.⁵¹² They found “large quantities” of food aid which had expired in 2004 – years before the aid program even began.⁵¹³



This pile of unused wheelbarrows left to rust in a warehouse is just one of the many examples of how USAID wasted millions of dollars through the mismanagement of a program intended to provide aid to families in Afghanistan.

The inspectors photographed great tangled piles of wheelbarrows, rusted from sitting outside without protection, bundles of blankets sodden from rain after also being stored outside, and more.⁵¹⁴

One thing they did not find was proper inventory records, which would have allowed them to quantify the waste and ruin they recorded. The haphazard nature of storage inspectors found “did not permit counting.”⁵¹⁵

The IG also reported outright fraud in the program — \$180,000 pocketed by aid workers hired to distribute the assistance.⁵¹⁶ Inspectors also reported over \$3.5 million that the program improperly spent on used vehicles, ignoring USAID's ban on such purchases without specific approval.⁵¹⁷

Finally, the IG reported that contrary to previous agreements, program employees failed to verify the delivery of nearly three-quarters of all assistance the program allegedly handed out. “As a result, USAID lacks adequate assurance that Afghan Civilian Assistance Program funds have reached the intended beneficiaries.”⁵¹⁸

91) Feces -Throwing Reveals Communication Skills in Chimps – (GA) \$592,527

Chimpanzees will often throw food or feces at passersby. Taxpayers have funded a study to figure out the origins of this odd behavior.

William Hopkins, at Agnes Scott College, and researchers at the Yerkes National Primate Research Center (associated with Emory University) used a portion of the \$600,000 from the National Institutes of Health in 2011 to assist their study of throwing behavior in chimpanzees and its neurological origins.^{519, 520, 521} Chimpanzees are one of very few organisms that can throw objects, which zoo visitors can often observe. For example, one of the investigators' research papers says, "Some of the chimpanzees will pile faeces or wet chow in their cage and wait for visitors to pass by before throwing this at them."⁵²²

Their studies have found that chimps in the wild seldom use throwing to obtain food. Rather, chimpanzees learned to throw objects in order to "control or manipulate behavior" of other apes or even humans.⁵²³ That's not to say that throwing helps chimps in captivity get what they want. The researchers observe that chimpanzee caretakers rarely "reward a chimpanzee with food immediately after they had just been soiled with faeces by the very same ape."⁵²⁴

Hopkins and his team wanted ultimately to understand what throwing feces and food has to do with the neurological origins of communications in chimps. To that end, they took MRIs of chimpanzee brains, and then put those chimps through other cognitive tests.⁵²⁵ They found that chimps that excelled at throwing feces and other objects had better communication skills than chimps with less-refined skills.⁵²⁶

William Hopkins has received NIH grants in the past to study other ape issues, including right-handedness versus left-handedness and whether that predicts reproductive success.⁵²⁷

92) Federally-funded Dragon Robots – (MA) \$130,987

The National Science Foundation approved a four-year \$923,000 grant for researchers to study how robots can help preschoolers learn language skills.⁵²⁸

The new robots, which will be designed as dragons, will be able to mimic many of the responses that humans make. "Nodding and eye gaze" will be components of the robot interaction.⁵²⁹ These responses are essential for the robot to form a bond with the child, researchers say.⁵³⁰ Videos and computers lack such cues and are not as helpful for teaching as a responsive dragon robot might be.⁵³¹

A "robot partner" may be able to aid the development of a preschooler's vocabulary, which is a significant predictor of future academic success.⁵³² Children lacking regular interaction with a nurturing caregiver or other social interaction may be especially benefitted by this technology, according to the investigators.⁵³³



Researchers are spending nearly \$1 million to determine if preschoolers can develop language skills by bonding with this dragon robot.

93) Steamboat Interpretive Center – (LA) \$5.18 Million

Louisiana received a \$5.2 million federal transportation grant to construct the Steamboat Overlook Interpretive Center. The facility will contain interpretive exhibits depicting the history and culture of the steamboat era. The displays will specifically show the Mississippi River's impact on the "transportation, commerce, music, and the folklife and folklore of river life."⁵³⁴

The over-\$5 million in federal money for the \$6.5 million project came from the National Scenic Byways Program. The funding announcement noted the "grant is the largest award given to any National Scenic Byways Program this year, and it is the second largest award given to any state in the history of the program."⁵³⁵

At a time when Louisiana has 3,800 deficient bridges, it is unclear why taxpayers are spending millions on a Steamboat Interpretive Center.⁵³⁶

94) Federal Grant to Study Women, Weaving and Wool in Iceland, AD 874-1800 – (RI) \$338,998

The National Science Foundation awarded a multi-year grant to study the impact of women on the Icelandic textile industry from the Viking Era to the 19th Century.⁵³⁷ The research investigates "the roles of imported textiles and dyes within Iceland" and the ways that "women's work" in textile production influenced both Iceland's domestic and international commerce."⁵³⁸

Two years into the project, the principal investigator provided a glimpse into the research in a presentation, which she titled “Time Warp: Women, Weaving and Wool in Iceland AD 900-1800.” The presentation included images ranging from the fairy tale character Rumpelstiltskin to the “Icelandic national costume developed out of traditional existing garments between the mid 18th and early 19th centuries.”⁵³⁹

Instead of investigating the Icelandic Viking-era economy, perhaps the government should focus on addressing the struggling American industries in 2011.

95) Federal Dollars Goes Toward Cowboy Poetry – (NV) \$50,000

There is an annual Cowboy Poetry Party. It is where “cowboys and cowgirls, poets and musicians, artisans and scholars, rural people and city folks” get together to recite prose for a week in January.⁵⁴⁰ The National Cowboy Poetry Gathering is hosted every year by the Western Folklife Center.⁵⁴¹ This year the center received \$50,000 to “support the production of the semi-permanent exhibition *Ranchlines: Verses and Visions of the Rural West*.” The display will include “contemporary handmade horse gear and other crafts to emphasize creativity, ingenuity, and a poetic approach to life and work in the rural ranching West.”⁵⁴²

The gathering has a colorful history. It has been described as “a gathering of tribes, a ‘Class A’ drunk in a long series of various-classed drunks.... Ranchers say these few days contain the highest concentration of lies in any one place at any one time.”⁵⁴³ The federal government has a long history of supporting the Western Folklife Center and the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering. According to one government report, “The year 1985 marked the beginning of the National Endowment for the Arts’ contribution to this unique art form with support for the first annual Cowboy Poetry Gathering, held in the railroad town of Elko, Nevada, and sponsored by the Western Folklife Center.”⁵⁴⁴ Additionally, the Western Folklife Center has received at least nine separate federal grants since 2001.⁵⁴⁵



96) Baaaadddd Spending – (MT) \$742,907

Having trouble with weeds? Try sheep.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture awarded a \$742,907 grant to Montana State University (MSU)⁵⁴⁶ to research the use of “targeted sheep grazing” to control weeds. MSU faculty will

also develop two new college courses based on their findings. The researchers note that since organic farmers do not use chemicals for weed control, they often have to till the soil to clear a field of weeds and prepare it for planting. Tilling, however, can put the topsoil at risk of washing or blowing away.⁵⁴⁷

The solution? Let grazing sheep munch on the weeds. The strategy allows farms to take advantage of “weeds, cover crops and crop residues for fiber and meat production,” according to MSU’s lead researcher on the project. In addition, according to the university, “sheep manure and urine will act as natural fertilizers.”⁵⁴⁸

But is new research in this field necessary? Mankind has understood for thousands of years that sheep graze. The American Sheep Industry Association sells a “Targeted Grazing Handbook,” which includes information about how grazing sheep can contain weeds, for \$25.⁵⁴⁹

Taxpayers should say “bah!” to this unnecessary research project.



97) Upgrades to Street Median in Shopping District – (DC) \$83,000

Concrete planter boxes in the median of a shop-lined street in Washington DC will be getting an “irrigation system, soil preparation, plantings, and the addition of a new iron fence”⁵⁵⁰ thanks to over \$80,000 in federal money from the Federal Highway Administration. The street, Connecticut Avenue, is one of the main avenues through Dupont Circle, an upper-income district in Washington, DC.

The press release announcing the funding justified the project by stating the “project will contribute to a marked improvement in the aesthetic quality of this highly visible and utilized commercial corridor.”⁵⁵¹

98) \$1 Bills Literally Costing Taxpayers Millions – (U.S. Treasury Department) – \$184 Million



Though it can be cheaper to produce, paper currency wears out faster than coins, and as a result costs taxpayers more in the long run. Consequently, if the federal government replaced the \$1 bill with the \$1 coin it would save the government approximately \$184 million a year, or \$5.5 billion over 30 years.⁵⁵² According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), “Over the last 47 years, Australia, Canada, France, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Spain, and the UK, among others, have replaced lower-denomination notes with coins.”⁵⁵³

99) Website Redesign for Jonathan Bird’s Blue World – (MA) \$131,895



The National Science Foundation awarded over \$130,000 to Christine and Jonathan Bird to redesign Mr. Bird’s website called, Jonathan Bird’s *Blue World*.⁵⁵⁴ *Blue World* is a television show that often airs on PBS stations.⁵⁵⁵ The show features Mr. Bird scuba diving and exploring the ocean. The Birds seek to use the grant to make their site “more widely accessible as an open source via an internet connection with dynamic search capability.”⁵⁵⁶ The site includes episodes of the show, webisodes, a sponsor feature page, and a store with DVDs of each season of the show.⁵⁵⁷

100) Foundation with Hazy Outcomes and Hazier Purposes – (Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation) \$499,000

Many federal programs suffer from overly broad, ambiguous missions. The Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation, which received nearly half a million dollars,⁵⁵⁸ offers one of the best examples of this problem. The foundation was established in 1992 “to encourage and support research, study, and labor designed to produce new discoveries in all fields of endeavor for the benefit of mankind.” In other words, to encourage and support just about anything.



According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, initial funding for the foundation was derived from the sale of three denominations of specially minted coins sold by the U.S. mint from August 1992 through 1993.⁵⁵⁹ But Congress authorized funding for the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation in the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009, because funding from the sale of the special coins had been depleted.

The President's Budget recommends eliminating funding for the Foundation, noting it “has not consistently demonstrated clear outcomes from its awards and has high overhead costs.

No administration has proposed funding for the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation since the creation of the Foundation almost two decades ago.”⁵⁶⁰

- ¹ Website of Politifact.com, “Senators Ring Alarm About ‘4 billion’ Daily Debt,” <http://www.politifact.com/georgia/statements/2011/apr/11/saxby-chambliss/senators-ring-alarm-about-4-billion-debt-problem/>, accessed December 14, 2011.
- ² Carney, Tim P. “GOP and Dems Get Taxpayer Subsidies for Conventions,” *Washington Examiner*, June 22, 2011, <http://washingtonexaminer.com/politics/2011/06/gop-and-dems-get-taxpayer-subsidies-conventions>, accessed December 1, 2011.
- ³ “Federal Funding for 2012 Presidential Nominating Conventions, *Congressional Research Service*, October 21, 2011, report provided to office of Senator Coburn, page 2.
- ⁴ “Federal Funding for 2012 Presidential Nominating Conventions, *Congressional Research Service*, October 21, 2011, report provided to office of Senator Coburn, page 2.
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