

SENATOR JEFF FLAKE PRESENTS

WASTEBOOK

THE FARCE AWAKENS



A REPORT ON WASTEFUL FEDERAL SPENDING STARRING MONKEYS ON TREADMILLS, PARTIES FOR HIPSTERS AND SHEEP IN MICROGRAVITY FEATURING PARTY BUSES, WINEMAKING FOR MINORS, THE SCIENCE OF BEER KOOZIES, ZOMBIES IN THE WHITE HOUSE, LIFE-SIZE PAC MAN, DATING SECRETS FOR THE UNATTRACTIVE AND DOZENS MORE

DECEMBER 2015

WASTEBOOK 2015

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METHODOLOGY

For inclusion in Wastebook, some or all of the expenditure or work for an entry occurred in calendar year 2015 or Fiscal Year 2015, which began October 1, 2014 and ended September 30, 2015.

Some or all of the money from a grant, loan, contract, tax break, or other federal expenditure was spent to support the activities described in the entry.

The best effort was made to determine the spending amount during the time period described. However, in some cases the exact amount spent on the particular activity was not tracked by the agency, could not be determined or was spent over a number of years, including future years. Therefore, the amount provided may be the total amount budgeted for the program or grant profiled.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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A LONG TIME AGO IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY...

Monkeys running in hamster balls on a treadmill. Zombies in the White House. Sheep in microgravity. Cartooning in India. A life-size Pac-Man game. Jazz lessons for robots. A cloud city on Venus!

Despite the public ballyhooing over budget austerity, the government didn't come up short on outlandish ways to waste money in 2015.

Like the monkeys on the treadmill, Washington politicians also ran in place trading familiar arguments in the seemingly never ending match of budget brinksmanship. But the stare down over whether or not to increase spending didn't last long.

Instead of one side blinking, both sides winked and the budget caps agreed to just a few years ago were lifted. Proving once again no matter how mired in gridlock Washington may appear, there is always one area of agreement—spending more.

Washington equates caring with the amount of dollars spent. But there has been an awakening in the farce. When the same group who created the problems are the same ones trusted to fix them, what amount of dollars and cents can make up for the lack of commonsense in how the money is spent? For instance, last year Congress approved billions of dollars of additional funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to erase the medical backlog that was literally killing veterans. A year later, the number of veterans waiting to see a doctor increased! Meanwhile some VA executives abused their positions to create their own plum jobs with higher pay and less work and even charge taxpayers for their moving expenses. The VA also spent millions of dollars on unnecessary junkets and artwork. With more than a half-a-million low-income families on waiting lists for housing assistance, the Department of Housing and Urban Development is subsidizing rent for thousands who are well-off—earning six-figure salaries and owning assets worth millions of dollars—and some of its own employees.

Over a half-a-billion dollars intended for defense and security were squandered on projects that did nothing to make us safer and some that actually made us less safe. The \$500 million Pentagon program to combat ISIS in Syria ended up instead arming an al-Qaeda affiliate. In Afghanistan, the Department of Defense squandered \$110 million lighting and heating hundreds of empty buildings while soldiers in Kandahar went days without lights or heat. DOD pumped \$43 million into the construction of the world's most expensive gas station that dispenses a type of fuel very few automobiles in that country run on. More than \$700,000 of military supplies to assist Yemen fight terrorists are wasting away in warehouses in Virginia incurring storage fees and now must be destroyed at an additional cost to taxpayers. The National Football League and professional sports teams intercepted millions of dollars of Pentagon contracts that included putting on displays of paid patriotism.

A \$2 million campaign paid for by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is encouraging tourism to Lebanon, a country the U.S. State Department is urging Americans to avoid due to the heightened risk of attacks and kidnapping by terrorists.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) spent almost \$2 million to pay nearly 100 employees not to work and more than \$1 million to lease unneeded spare vehicles. DHS also handed out \$3 million to the owners of party buses, including one described as a “nightclub on wheels,” and luxury coaches to escort socialites and vacationers to the playground of the rich and famous. The party didn’t stop there either.

A former cast member of MTV’s *The Real World* nabbed \$5 million from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to throw parties for hipsters. The Department of Agriculture (USDA) picked up the tab to send a group to the Great American Beer Festival. It also sponsored the Ultimate Tailgate Party Package at a college football game and a sing-along show tunes brunch party. Residents of Kansas City were dancing in the streets this spring —despite having one of the worst pothole problems in the nation—at a block party paid for by the Department of Transportation (DOT).

Taxpayer funded science projects even sounded like they were concocted at a frat house rather than a government research agency. The National Science Foundation is studying whether a koozie does, in fact, keep a can of beer cold, what makes those looking for love online decide to swipe right, and how to date someone out of your league. It is also developing a “fat detector” to determine if someone is overweight just by looking at their face. And NIH research concluded pizza is as addictive to college students as crack. None of these studies is likely to unlock a cure to cancer or solve any of the other real challenges facing our nation. But each will add to our national debt which now exceeds \$18.6 trillion. Spending \$1 million to put a dozen monkeys on a treadmill may sound totally bananas to the average taxpayer with a median household income of \$54,000 , but it’s pocket change to the big spenders in Washington who collectively burn through \$7 million a minute. No one can even keep track of how, where or even why all of this money is being spent.

Senator Tom Coburn created *Wastebook* to do just that and put a real face on questionable spending. Rabbit massages, tax breaks for the National Football League (NFL), shrimp on a treadmill, unemployment payments to millionaires and other subsidies for the rich and famous, and bridges to nowhere are just a handful of the hundreds of outlandish expenditures made famous by Senator Coburn’s waste reports. While Congress refused to cut the spending on these programs, the notoriety and public scorn was too much for many to withstand, even after Senator Coburn retired back home to Oklahoma. Just this year, the NFL voluntarily gave up its tax exemption and that bridge to nowhere is officially going nowhere with Alaska canceling the project once and for all.

In his farewell address, Senator Coburn challenged every Member of Congress to produce their own wastebook to start a real debate about national budget priorities. While impossible to emulate or replace, Coburn has given us a great challenge and example. As a longtime admirer, former colleague, and friend, it is a great honor, heavy responsibility and awesome privilege to join others, like Senators James Lankford and John McCain, to try to carry forward the Coburn legacy of making those who spend accountable to those who pay tax dollars.

In the Coburn tradition, “*Wastebook 2015: The Farce Awakens*” contains 101 examples of egregious, outrageous and unnecessary government spending. Each represents thousands, millions or, in some cases, billions of dollars that could have been better spent on cancer research, strengthening national defense, caring for veterans, or not spent at all to reduce our debt. As you glance through, ask yourself if the federal government is really pinching pennies being frugal or if that claim is just a farce.

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1 PAID PATRIOTISM

Nationwide
Department of Defense
PART OF \$6.8 MILLION

America's pastime and favorite sports have been paid millions of taxpayer dollars to honor our nation's heroes over the past three years by the Department of Defense (DOD). Perhaps nothing better represents how out of control government spending has become.

The paid tributes included on-field color guards, enlistment and reenlistment ceremonies, and performances of the national anthem, full-field flag details, ceremonial first pitches and puck drops. DOD even paid teams for the "opportunity" to perform surprise welcome home events for troops returning from deployments and to recognize wounded warriors.¹

While well intentioned, any organization with a genuine interest in honoring service members should do so at its own expense rather than billing taxpayers.

In all, the military services reported spending \$53 million on marketing and advertising contracts with sports teams between 2012 and 2015.² More than \$10 million of that total was paid to teams in the National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB), National Basketball Association (NBA), National Hockey League (NHL), and Major League Soccer (MLS). DOD cannot fully account for the total cost, but displays of paid patriotism were contained within sports marketing contracts totaling at least \$6.8 million since 2012.³

The Department claims these contracts are intended for recruitment, but does not uniformly measure whether these activities are actually contributing to recruiting goals. Some of what was included in the contracts appears to be legitimate marketing, such as stadium signs, social media mentions, and booth space for recruiters at games. But many of the contracts contained questionable expenses such as game tickets, appearances by players or team mascots, team apparel, and autographed memorabilia.⁴

The Pentagon's paid patriotism in 2015 included:

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- A U.S. Air Force contract with NASCAR totaling nearly \$1.6 million that included autograph sessions with Aric Almirola at an Air Force recruiting booth, meet-and-greets and other appearances by Richard Petty, and 20 Richard Petty Driving Experience ride-alongs;
- As part of a \$150,000 contract with the NFL's Atlanta Falcons, the Georgia Army National Guard (GAARNG) color guard participated in a military appreciation game and also attended a training camp, which included the giveaway of co-branded promotional items such as a hat, flag, or rally towel for 500 attendees;
- GAARNG also had a \$150,000 contract with the MLB's Atlanta Braves that included sponsorship of four military appreciation games;
- The Minnesota Army National Guard (MNARNG) paid \$100,000 to the NHL's Minnesota Wild for a contract that included a color guard ceremony and opportunity for a soldier to rappel from the catwalk to deliver the game puck, recognition of a MNARNG soldier of the game and flag bearer highlighted on the center scoreboard at every regular season and postseason Wild home game, and special recognition during presenting night;
- The \$35,000 contract the Washington Army National Guard (WAARNG) awarded to the MLS's Seattle Sounders included WAARNG recognition and a compelling Army National Guard public service message to be played on Soundervision video boards at Sounders home games; and
- A \$75,000 Utah Army National Guard (UTARNG) contract with the MLS's Real Salt Lake included color guard ceremonies and a military appreciation night where the UTARNG soldiers participated in pregame and halftime recognition ceremonies plus 150 tickets to the game.⁵



A member of the Minnesota Army National Guard rappels from the catwalk to deliver the game puck at a Minnesota Wild hockey game, which was paid for as part of a contract with the Pentagon.

These expenses are all the more difficult to explain at a time when the Secretary of Defense has warned Congress that the spending cap imposed by the Budget Control Act “threatens

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our military's readiness, the size of our war-fighting forces, the capabilities of our air- naval fleets and, ultimately, the lives of our men and women in uniform"⁶

And while the Pentagon's budget has been sacked in recent years, the sports leagues are in the midst of a winning season. The National Football League (NFL) and its 32 teams took in an estimated \$12 billion last season.⁷ Major League Baseball is worth \$36 billion and the average baseball team is valued at \$1.2 billion.⁸

Like all Americans, these leagues benefit from the security provided by all those who protect our nation. The federal government spends an untold amount, for example, to provide security at the Super Bowl.⁹ It is, therefore, in the League's best interest to ensure those willing to answer the call to serve hear it.

Many professional sporting teams do pay tribute to our men and women in uniform without compensation from Uncle Sam. These genuine displays of national pride should not be cheapened by marketing gimmicks paid for by the Pentagon.

The 2016 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) included an amendment offered by Senators Jeff Flake and John McCain ending the practice of paid patriotism. While the bill was initially vetoed by the president, DOD has since discontinued and the NFL has called on all clubs to stop accepting payment for taxpayer funded salutes.¹⁰

The NFL has promised to audit its teams' contracts and return any of the money that may have been spent on paid patriotism. "If we find that inappropriate payments were made," NFL commissioner Roger Goodell wrote, "they will be refunded in full."¹¹

Commissioner of Major League Baseball Rob Manfred, however, defends the paid patriotism deals, saying "I think that our clubs for the minuscule amount of money involved here is—it's just not material to their business. And I think that the amount of things that we do free for the military, hundreds and hundreds of fold makes up for whatever small payments are involved."¹² Although millions of dollars were ultimately misspent, in the end taxpayers scored a touchdown by tackling paid patriotism.



The Atlanta Braves were among the professional sports teams receiving contracts from the Pentagon for displays of paid patriotism, such as military appreciation games.¹³

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2 MONKEYS ON A TREADMILL

Texas/Maryland
National Institutes of Health
\$1 MILLION

Take the monkey and run.

That's the title of the aptly named study detailing how the Southwest National Primate Research Center trained twelve marmoset monkeys to run on a treadmill with funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).¹⁴

Each of the twelve little monkeys was put into a "transparent rodent exercise ball." The balls of monkeys were then placed onto a standard human NordicTrak treadmill. The treadmill was started at a low speed and gradually increased to 1 mile per hour.¹⁵



Twelve little monkeys were trained to run in a rodent ball on a treadmill in a NIH funded study.

The monkeys did acclimate to running in the exercise ball on the treadmill, but not without some spills and mishaps along the way. One vomited in his exercise ball and three others "defecated in their exercise ball."¹⁶ Another monkey "in the treadmill running group died during week 11 of the study, for reasons not related to the study," according to the researchers.¹⁷

The scientists say "while it was technically forced exercise, it did not appear to induce stress in the marmosets."¹⁸

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They also acknowledge studies have previously been conducted with macaques on treadmills, but claim “to our knowledge, this is the first described method to engage marmosets in aerobic exercise.”

They do point out “the main potential limitation with exercise training and testing is time, as this process is labor intensive. We worked with each marmoset 5 days/week, for one month, habituating and training to the capture and exercise paradigms. Maintaining the exercise then occurred 3 days each week for 3 months.”

What do the findings of this study mean for the future of science and monkeys?



The researchers say more studies of monkeys running on treadmills can be conducted for more meaningful purposes. Specifically, they assert “these techniques should be useful to researchers wishing to address physiological responses of exercise in a marmoset model.”¹⁹

A monkey in a hamster ball running on a treadmill.

And in a case of monkey-see, monkey-do, the National Institute on Aging is already spending more than \$600,000 to conduct its own monkey on a treadmill study.²⁰ “A treadmill was purchased and a ventilated-lexan box was designed to confine the monkey to the treadmill. Several monkeys are currently walking on the treadmill daily,” according to project information posted by NIH.²¹

The Southwest National Primate Research Center, located in Texas, received \$8 million from NIH in 2015 for the grant that financed the 12 little monkeys running on a treadmill study.^{22,23} Over the past decade, the facility has collected nearly \$70 million in grants and contracts from various federal agencies.²⁴ During this same period, the center has also been slapped with fines totaling more than \$30,000 by the federal government for a number of violations, including performing a necropsy on a baboon that was still alive.²⁵ USDA identified 14 violations of the Animal Welfare Act at the center over a two year period.²⁶

While primate research can further scientific understanding, this is the kind of monkey business that makes taxpayers go bananas.

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3 EXTREME TOURISM

Lebanon
United States Agency for International Development
\$2.1 MILLION

Unless you are into extreme tourism, chances are you did not choose Lebanon as the destination of your family's summer vacation this year.

The U.S. State Department issued a travel warning in May urging Americans “to avoid all travel to Lebanon because of ongoing safety and security concerns.” U.S. citizens have been killed in bombings and kidnapped within the Middle Eastern nation in recent years. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS) terrorists have staged attacks along the nation's eastern border with Syria and there are tensions along its southern border with Israel as well. “Sudden outbreaks of violence can occur at any time in Lebanon,” including attacks by suicide bombers, according to the State Department.²⁷ Islamic State sleeper cells are also believed to be hidden within Lebanon.²⁸



USAID spent more than \$2 million this year to promote tourism to Lebanon, a nation the State Department is warning Americans to avoid due to terrorist threats.

Despite these risks to U.S. citizens, the *United States Agency for International Development* (USAID) spent more than \$2 million this year to promote tourism to Lebanon.

USAID is funding two five-year programs—Lebanon Industry Value Chain Development (LIVCD) and Building Alliance for Local Advancement, Development, and Investment (BALADI). “Through BALADI, USAID has provided \$1.6 million for rural tourism related activities since 2012, and expects to invest around \$1.3 million this year. Through LIVCD, USAID has invested over \$1.3 million for rural tourism since

2012, and expects to provide more than \$850,000 this year.”²⁹

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The Jordan Tourism Board “seeks to attract visitors from the U.S., Mexico and Europe” and is “supported by annual grants from USAID Economic Growth Through Sustainable Tourism Project.”³⁰

Rock climbing is one of the ongoing USAID-supported projects in the Lebanon.³¹ “Through a USAID-supported project, guides will be trained to encourage a safe and sustainable climbing culture in the village” of Tannourine, says Katy Anderson of the Rock Climbing Association for Development.³² “We build rock climbs to boost the local economy through rural eco-tourism,” she says, but admits “there has not been a big outdoor leisure culture here” and the project’s “impact on local business has been slow.”³³ She points out “there are still landmines around Tannourine,” but adds “some of which have recently been cleared.”³⁴ Anderson admits “Lebanon may not be an easy sell to foreign tourists: most people are wary about flying into Beirut, and that’s before they realise [sic] how crazy the roads are. But the climbing community is more adventurous than most.”³⁵

A variety of other projects to attract tourists to Lebanon are in the planning process. A report prepared for USAID says, for example, “the development committee of the Hammana Municipality has been very active at developing tourism in the area with an ecotourism development initiative” which includes “the establishment of a “Laughter Festival.”³⁶ The report notes “the Ehmej municipality has been working over the past few years on developing ecotourism in the region with funds from USAID,” specifically mentioning “adventure tourism” as well as “kids’ activities.”³⁷



<http://www.baldati.com/event.php?id=322>

Americans would be wise to heed the warnings of the State Department rather than the urgings of the USAID and avoid vacationing in Lebanon at this time. Consider visiting the Grand Canyon instead.

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4 HIPSTER PARTIES

California
National Institutes of Health
\$5 MILLION

“Will you be there to help a hipster in need?”

That’s the question posed by the “Help A Hipster” movement³⁸ that has received nearly \$5 million of taxpayer funds from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) over the past five years.³⁹

The project organizes parties at bars and nightclubs, featuring indie rock bands, local artists and DJs, as well as other activities aimed at enticing hipsters to “take a stand against tobacco corporations.”⁴⁰

And when parties fail to achieve that goal, the intervention gets blunt, flashing cash in front of the hipsters’ ‘stache. “Quit smoking, get cash” offers one of the programs that hands out up to \$100 as a payoff to get hipsters to stop smoking.⁴¹



The federal government is spending \$5 million on a “Help A Hipster” movement, paying for parties and handing out free cash to entice hipsters to “take a stand against tobacco corporations.”⁴²

An unusual approach is necessary, the thinking goes, because hipsters are an unusual subculture.

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Hipsters disregard traditional health messages, notes the project leader, Pamela Ling, MD, MPH, who was a cast member on MTV's reality show, "The Real World."⁴³ "Saying 'Smoking is bad for you' isn't relevant to" hipsters, says Dr. Ling. "But they do care about self-expression and social justice."⁴⁴

"Hipsters are hard to define, because being hard to define is part of their culture. They initiate trends, and for the moment, that seems to bring a focus on flannel, facial hair, skinny jeans and off-kilter hats. To identify the hipsters, government-paid researchers used photos of people in various modes of dress and style, asking young people to describe them. If a particular look screamed 'hipster' over and over, the researchers used that as a guide."⁴⁵

Then Ling teamed up with the marketing agency Rescue Social Change Group to create a "social brand" called Commune, "which sponsors popular smoke-free events featuring local artists and alternative bands" and commissions artists to design T-shirts, "often with anti-Big Tobacco messages."

The Commune website declares "we have rejected big corporations for a long time, like Big Music that hinders creative freedom and Big Fashion that runs sweatshops. Our stand against Big Tobacco is even more important, since the industry contributes to things like world hunger, deforestation, and neo conservative policies."⁴⁶ One poster produced by Commune recommends "styling your sweet mustache," "listening to your favorite band that no one has heard of," or "practicing your next Instagram pose" to hipsters as alternatives to smoking.⁴⁷

But because hipsters tend to "be much more likely to be skeptical of government messaging," the "branding efforts don't emphasize that the government is behind it, and many in the target audience are unaware."⁴⁸

How would hipsters who reject everything big—Big Music, Big Fashion, and Big Corporations—react if they learned Big Government was using the same marketing tactics as Big Tobacco to manipulate their behavior?

Jeff Jordan of the Rescue Social Change Group says "you can look at it as being manipulated," but notes "we are genuinely investing" in the hipster community. "We are hiring these starving artists and asking them to make our messaging for us, so it's very much open (that we) have an interest in convincing hipsters to stop smoking, but it's very genuine."⁴⁹

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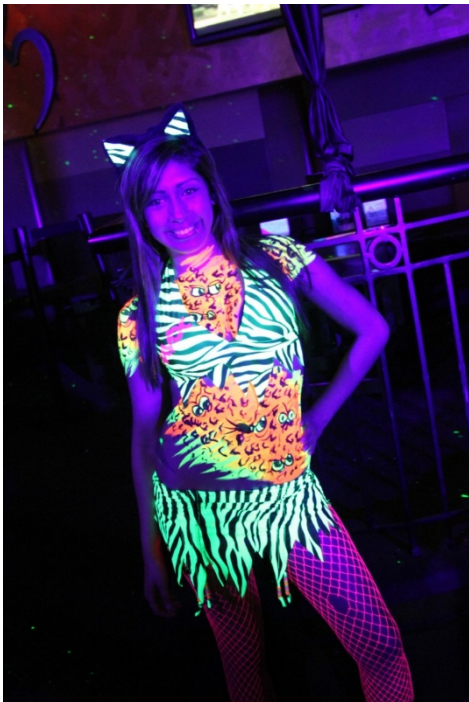
Researchers involved in the project even get to be part of the fun, hanging out in bars and clubs with the hipsters. Dr. Ling says “the best way to do the evaluation is to go to the bar, and do the survey in the bars with the people you’re really trying to reach.”⁵⁰

But is throwing free parties and handing out cash really convincing hipsters that smoking is not hip?

One of those who joined the “Commune quit group” is smoking again and admits, “I did it for the money,” he said. “I was wanting to not smoke as much, but knew I wasn’t going to quit.

Yeah, it’s only \$5 a week,” he said, but he was going to hang out at the Bluefoot [bar] anyway, so why not attend the group and make \$5 each time?” He and his friends were “unaware that Commune uses taxpayer funds. Most of them said they didn’t care as long as the movement continued throwing free parties and infusing money into the scene.”⁵¹

In addition to hipsters, the NIH grants are also paying to host parties for other social subgroups, such as “the Partier peer crowd” in Oklahoma City.



The Partier crowd is defined as having “frequent attendance at large nightclubs with dance and hip hop music played by DJs; a desire to engage in “exclusive” experiences (such as gaining access to a VIP lounge); fashion consciousness; concern for physical attractiveness; and achieving social status by exuding an image of confidence and financial success. Partiers were also reported to be social smokers, or frequently to pair tobacco and alcohol. For example, according to a participant describing a Partier, she ‘just looks like the type of girl to be like, ‘Oh, I’m drinking and smoking.’”⁵² Over a three year period, the NIH supported “events took place at popular Partier clubs and included influential DJs, promoters, and socialites.”⁵³ One of the events, Neon Animal, featured “hotties” who were “dressed in neon animal print,”⁵⁴

The National Cancer Institute attempted to convince “Partiers” in Oklahoma quit smoking by throwing parties like the Neon Animal, featuring “hotties” attired in neon animal prints.⁵⁵ But when the party was over, the researchers found “smoking rates did not change.”⁵⁶

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But when the party was over and the results of this intervention were studied, the researchers found “smoking rates did not change.”⁵⁷

Big government hanging with hipsters to bust a Moby and drink some bronsons is so fin.



This poster produced as part of NIH’s anti-tobacco initiative aimed at hipsters recommends “styling your sweet mustache” or “practicing your next Instagram pose” as alternatives to smoking.⁵⁸

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5 KOOZIES KEEP IT COOL

Washington State
National Science Foundation
\$1.3 MILLION

A foam koozie keeps a can of cold beer cool on a hot day, scientific fact or wishful drinking?

In an article entitled “Condensation, atmospheric motion, and cold beer” published in *Physics Today*, two researchers and a pair of students from the University of Washington (UW) investigated the question with funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF) discovered exactly how a koozie keeps a cold can of beer cool.⁵⁹



The National Science Foundation is keeping it cool with a koozie.

“Probably the most important thing a beer koozie does is not simply insulate the can, but keep condensation from forming on the outside of it,” explained UW professor Dale Durran.⁶⁰

The koozie is essential. “Do NOT just wipe off the drops” of condensation, warns the science writer in UW’s news office, “that will only make your drink even warmer.”⁶¹

Warming results when droplets of condensation form on a cold can or bottle. By preventing condensation from occurring, the koozie keeps a beverage from becoming warm.

The process known as latent heating is the inverse of the cooling effect caused by evaporation, like sweating to cool down. Because humidity and air temperature also play key roles in condensation, a can of beer warms

at different rates in different locations.

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The initial test of the experiment was conducted “using a space heater and hot shower to vary the temperature and humidity” in the basement bathroom of co-author Dargan Frierson, who is an associate professor of atmospheric sciences.⁶²

“You can’t write an article for *Physics Today* where the data has come from a setup on the top of the toilet tank in one of the author’s bathrooms,” said Durran, so the pair duplicated the experiment in other settings.⁶³

Based upon the findings of this study, a can of beer would heat faster in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia than any other place in the world.⁶⁴

The researchers are now working with the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) “to develop an educational tool that will let students around the world try the experiment and post their results online for comparison.”⁶⁵ NCAR is funded by NSF but also receives “significant additional support” from other U.S. government agencies.⁶⁶

“The point of the exercise wasn’t really to break new ground in atmospheric physics (or in summertime beverage consumption), but ‘to improve our intuition about the power of condensational heating,’” according to the researchers.⁶⁷ Admittedly, the findings and the effects of condensation and evaporation are well-known, but Duran says “we want people to appreciate how powerful this effect is.”⁶⁸



The researchers say “the educational goals of this project are to inform high school students, undergraduates, and the general public about the importance of condensation as a source of heat in the atmosphere.”⁶⁹

The research was supported with some funding from two National Science Foundation grants⁷⁰ that total nearly \$1.3 million.⁷¹

The take away for taxpayers who are funding this project: A koozie is more than a party accessory for frat boys, a commemorative keepsake from a wedding, or a novelty to advertise local businesses, it is an essential for keeping your favorite canned beverage cold on a hot day.

Researchers measuring the power of a koozie to keep a cold beer cool.⁷²

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6 PIZZA ADDICITON

New York
National Institute of Drug Abuse
\$780,000

Pizza may be as addictive as crack, according to a study of college students supported by the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA).⁷³



College students received academic credits for participating in a government sponsored food addiction study that found pizza may be as addictive as crack.

The study's results come as a surprise to absolutely no one. After all, college students eat pizza for breakfast, lunch, and dinner or in between meals or as a late night snack. And they are not alone.

"Pizza is the world's most popular food," declares the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).⁷⁴ One in 8 Americans eats pizza on any given day, according to government statistics.

For the NIDA study, more than 100 undergraduate college students at the University of Michigan completed a survey indicating which of 35 foods they associated with addictive-like eating behaviors.⁷⁵

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The students who participated were paid \$20 or received course credit.⁷⁶ Students at other colleges will experience pizza envy since their schools probably don't offer similar rewards for being graded on their food addiction.

When the results were tallied, chocolate, ice cream and French fries were rated as even more addictive than pizza for most students.⁷⁷

The participants were quizzed to see if they had developed a tolerance to the high that results from consuming certain foods and, therefore, had to eat more and more to get the same good feeling.⁷⁸

The second part of the study included nearly 400 other adults and once again pizza topped this list of food cravings. Cucumbers were rated the least addictive of the choices.⁷⁹

"Highly processed foods, or foods with added amounts of fat and/or refined carbohydrates, were most associated with addictive-like eating behaviors," the researchers concluded after reviewing the results of both groups. "Nine out of the ten foods at the top of the list were highly processed and high in both fat and refined carbohydrates. Soda (not diet) was the exception, which is highly processed and high in refined carbohydrates, but not fat."⁸⁰

Despite the comparisons to drugs addiction, the study did not find that pizza or any other food to be "extremely problematic" in terms of its magnitude of addictiveness.⁸¹ The results, however, do provide "preliminary evidence" that "highly processed foods, which may share characteristics with drugs of abuse (e.g. high dose, rapid rate of absorption) appear to be particularly associated with 'food addiction.'"⁸²

The researchers propose further studies "directly observing eating behaviors associated with highly processed foods in order to examine whether addictive-like mechanisms, such as withdrawal and tolerance, may be present."⁸³

The study was funded with a \$168,000 grant this year, for a total of \$780,000 over the past five years.⁸⁴

The money spent on this study was more than enough to buy each of the participating students diagnosed with a pizza addiction their very own pizza every week for a year—with lots of toppings,⁸⁵ but don't expect cucumbers to be one of them.

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7 PARTY BUS

Nationwide
Department of Homeland Security
\$ 3 MILLION

Entertainment buses chartered for bachelor and bachelorette parties and luxury motor coaches chauffeuring the affluent to the playground of the rich and famous are taking taxpayers for a ride by picking up federal homeland security funds.⁸⁶

The Intercity Bus Security Grant Program (IBSGP) provides funding to “owners and operators of fixed route intercity and charter buses” that serve select areas designated for *Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) funding* by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).⁸⁷

The program allocated \$3 million this year.⁸⁸ The recipients may spend the money on operating costs, public awareness campaigns, or renovations to buses and bus terminals intended to enhance security.⁸⁹

White Knight Limousine/White Knight Coaches received \$8,000 from the program this year.⁹⁰ The company offers a variety of VIP charter buses and limousines and promises “The White Knight Executive Lounge is your nightclub on wheels!”⁹¹ The company previously picked up a \$42,000 grant from the program.⁹²

White Knight guarantees its party bus “will impress you and your friends with its laser light show, LED mood lighting, and satellite TV system. This mobile party platform is great for weddings, proms, roadtrips to see our Tigers play, bachelor/bachelorette parties, birthdays, and any special night out on the town.”⁹³

“While our party bus may not be the least expensive in town, our quality coach and superb chauffeurs make White Knight the best choice,” reassures the company.⁹⁴

The Hamptons of New York have long been regarded as “the *playground for the rich and famous*,” and DHS is providing funding to two self-described luxury bus companies that serve the area.

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White Knight, which touts its Party Bus as “your nightclub on wheels,” is receiving funding from the Intercity Bus Security Grant Program this year.

The Jitney, which has “maintained a near monopoly on express transportation” between the Hamptons and New York City for decades, has almost become synonymous with getting to and from the Hamptons.⁹⁵

Celebrities have even been spotted heading to the Hamptons onboard the Jitney.^{96 97} A Southampton newspaper writes “some celebrities ‘adopted’ the Hampton Jitney service,” noting “artist Roy Lichtenstein contributed the famous white wave lines that came to adorn the sides of the coaches” and “Lauren Bacall did a radio commercial praising the Jitney.”⁹⁸

The Jitney Ambassador may look like a bus on the outside, but inside it’s “a little like your rich uncle’s hobby yacht, decked out in royal-blue leather and hardwood floors,” explains the *Wall Street Journal*.⁹⁹

“When it comes to premium comfort and convenience, there’s no better way to travel than Hampton Jitney’s Ambassador Service. With 30 amazingly comfortable 3-across seats, our Ambassador coach carries just half the passengers as our regular coaches,” the company boasts. “And, as the roomiest coach traveling to the East End, it offers the ultimate in comfort and convenience, such as extra-wide plush seats, extended legroom (it was designed for basketball players), spacious overhead and underneath storage compartments plus individual electric power outlets. In addition to rapid boarding, a courteous on-board attendant provides a wide variety of complimentary refreshments, snacks and reading material on every trip.”¹⁰⁰

“We have wine service,” points out a longtime Jitney employee.¹⁰¹ “And every so often, passengers get goodie bags with products that advertisers pay the Jitney to distribute like Tory Burch gift cards and Vera Bradley accessories.”¹⁰²

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“Reclining in my leather seat, I hardly cared that I was drinking [white wine from the Sagaponack vineyard] from a plastic cup while rumbling down the Long Island Expressway. I was on my way to Montauk on the hushed Hampton Ambassador bus, while my fellow passengers were either dozing or reading as the pleasant man in the polo shirt went from seat to seat with newspapers, chips, cookies, coffee. I was almost hoping to get stuck in traffic,” wrote one rider.¹⁰³

The company’s marketing manager says Ambassador was going for “a royal feeling,” which is why the staff wear blue shirts and “the attendant had her nails painted to match. Even the toilet water was blue.”¹⁰⁴

The company brings in about \$20 million a year in revenue.¹⁰⁵ This year the Jitney received \$20,752 from IBSGP in September.¹⁰⁶¹⁰⁷



Hampton Transportation Ventures, which runs the Hampton Luxury Liner, filed for bankruptcy after receiving a homeland security grant.

The Hampton Jitney previously was awarded about \$83,000 from DHS. The expenditure was questioned at the time by the then-chairman of the New York State Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Military Affairs who argued the money could have been prioritized for security enhancements at installations that “house thousands of people” rather than a bus that “holds 40.”¹⁰⁸

Hampton Transportation Ventures, which runs the Hampton Luxury Liner, also picked up \$15,000 from the program this year, only to file bankruptcy soon thereafter.¹⁰⁹ “This bus is for socialites,” according to the *New York Times*.¹¹⁰ In addition to trips between New York City and the Hamptons, the Luxury Liner also offers music and wine tours.¹¹¹ In September, however,

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the future of the company became uncertain after it defaulted on its loans and was forced to file for chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.¹¹²

Other charter bus companies receiving funds include:



Colorado Ramblin' Express, Inc. collected nearly \$50,000.¹¹³ "At Ramblin Express, we provide comfortable, reliable and affordable daily casino shuttle trips to Colorado's Casinos," the company promises. "Our team and fleet of luxury motorcoaches have safely served over 2,000,000 passengers, and counting!" In addition, "you'll also get valuable casino coupons that will pay most of your fare back with minimal casino play."¹¹⁴



Celebrity Coaches of America, a Premier Charter bus company in Las Vegas, received \$11,300.¹¹⁵ The company "specializes in charter buses, mini buses, midsize charter buses and party buses or commonly known as limousine style coaches" and boasts providing transportation services to celebrities, sports teams and others for more than a decade.¹¹⁶



Badger Coaches, Inc. of Wisconsin, which received \$69,000, offers "High Rollers Casino Bus Trips" to local casinos.¹¹⁷

While DHS should provide expertise, guidance and recommendations to enhance security, it is not the responsibility of federal government to subsidize these select companies that are largely financially successful. There are over 750 million passenger trips on charter buses every year¹¹⁸ and the industry earns \$6 billion in revenue annually.¹¹⁹

This program misses the bus and it's time to put the brakes on this corporate welfare.

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8 SHEEP IN MICROGRAVITY

Colorado
NASA
\$1.2 MILLION

Hey diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle;

The *sheep* jumped over the moon?

NASA isn't planning to launch sheep into space, but the agency has rounded up a herd of sheep as part of a study to "mimic the impact of space travel on bones to better understand bone health and healing."¹²⁰ The three year project, which is costing taxpayers \$1.2 million, is being conducted at Colorado State University (the school's mascot coincidentally is a sheep).¹²¹

The sheep aren't floating around inside an anti-gravity chamber or on the International Space Station. Instead, the back leg of each sheep was put in a brace that kept it from bearing weight, simulating the effects of microgravity.¹²²

During Phase 1 of the study, 23 sheep were put in the microgravity brace for eight weeks and monitored by orthopedic surgeons to "provide pain relief when necessary."^{123 124}

"Because the bone was isolated from any gravitational forces, the research team was able to discern that the sheep's bone density decreased—as did the load required to fracture the bone. The weakened bone could break more easily," the researchers reported.¹²⁵

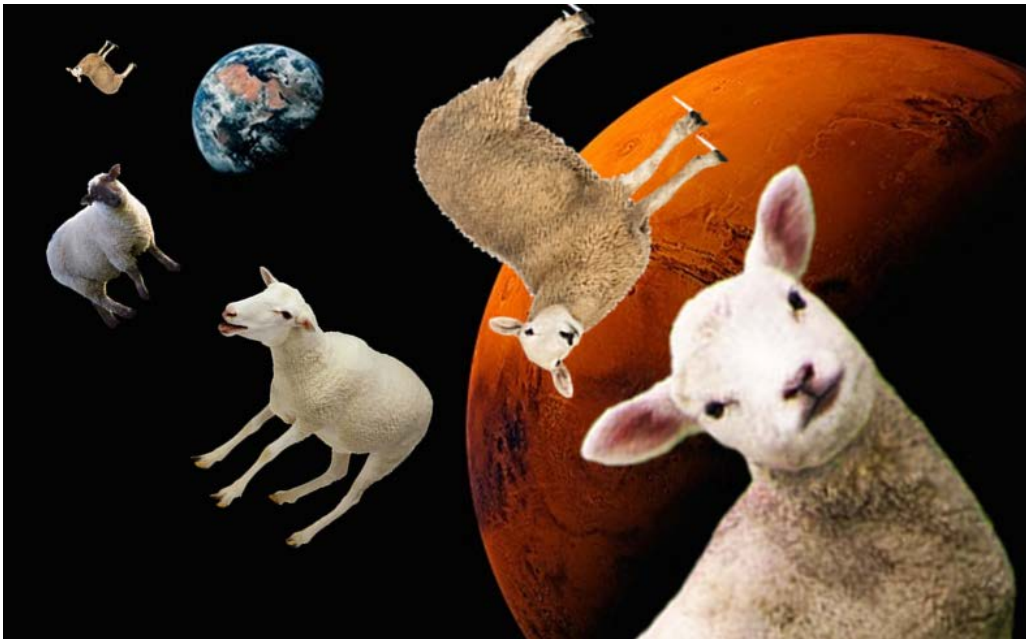
The second phase of the study "focused on bone regeneration in the absence of gravity." The microgravity-simulating brace was attached to 20 sheep for three weeks. Then veterinary orthopedic surgeons removed part of bone in the sheep's leg that had been suspended.¹²⁶ The brace was then reattached to the sheep's leg to observe how the bones healed in simulated microgravity over four weeks.¹²⁷

"We found that it definitely does slow down the healing," said Ross Palmer, one of the researchers involved in the study. Palmer says "although this project is a niche application for NASA, there's also a massive potential benefit for the greater population."¹²⁸

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The researchers also hope to use the sheep to “develop treadmill protocols that enhance bone fracture healing in the presence of simulated microgravity.”¹²⁹



NASA is spending \$1.2 million to study the impact of microgravity on sheep.

NASA, which “has long known astronauts lose bone density in space,”¹³⁰ has already been conducting human studies on these same topics for years.

Astronauts on the International Space Station who worked out on an Advanced Resistive Exercise Device, for example, “returned to Earth with more lean muscle and less fat, and maintained their whole body and regional bone mineral density compared to when they launched.”¹³¹ Several other studies evaluating “dietary effects on bone are being studied on the space station right now.”¹³²

Back on Earth, NASA has been funding “pillownaut” studies for fifty year in which bed-ridden test subjects lie around for months at a time to examine the impact of microgravity on bones and the rest of the human body.¹³³ And an “anti-gravity” treadmill, derived from technology developed by NASA to prevent astronaut bone loss, has been used in physical therapy for years.¹³⁴

Clearly, NASA is making advances in identifying and addressing this problem with human subjects. Unless NASA plans to colonize Mars with a herd of sheep, putting the animals in microgravity is just a *baaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaad* way to spend \$1.2 million.

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RICH SUBSIDIES

Nationwide
Department of Housing and Urban Development
\$104.4 MILLION

Some residents of public housing intended for low-income families own real estate and are even earning big bucks from rental properties of their own.

A Nebraska resident receiving federal housing subsidies, for example, owns real estate valued at \$470,600, has assets totaling nearly \$1.6 million, and earns an annual income nearly double the financial threshold to be eligible for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) public housing program.¹³⁵

Over 300,000 families are on a waiting list to receive housing assistance in New York City,¹³⁶ which has been ranked the second most expensive city to rent in America.¹³⁷ While household income must be less than \$67,000 to be eligible for rental assistance, a four-person household with a combined income of nearly half-a-million dollars has been receiving public housing despite exceeding the income eligibility since 2009. One of the members of the household owned real estate that produced over \$790,000 in rental income between 2009 and 2013.¹³⁸

It's all legal and it's not all that unusual: More than 25,200 households had incomes exceeding HUD's eligibility limits in July 2014, according to an audit by HUD's Office of Inspector General.¹³⁹ More than 1,000 households had incomes exceeding the qualifying limit by as much as \$50,000 or more.¹⁴⁰

Despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of lower-income families are on waiting lists for housing assistance, HUD defends the policy of subsidizing the rents of tenants earning higher incomes.

"As a result, HUD did not assist as many low-income families in need of housing as it could have," the OIG concluded.¹⁴¹ "HUD will pay \$104.4 million over the next year for public housing units occupied by overincome families that otherwise could have been used to house low-income families."¹⁴²

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A household is considered to be “overincome” if the combined annual income of its tenants exceeded HUD’s “qualifying income limits” for applying for admission to the public housing program.¹⁴³ In New York City that income threshold was \$67,100. In Nebraska it was \$33,500.¹⁴⁴

Los Angeles is providing subsidies for more than 100 “overincomed” households despite a waiting list of more than 43,400 families seeking rental assistance. The annual household income of one family receiving subsidized rent in Los Angeles exceeds \$200,000—nearly three times the income eligibility threshold for the program. The city’s housing authority defends the policy claiming “evicting overincome families would work against HUD’s efforts to deconcentrate poverty in public housing developments.”¹⁴⁵

Tenants in HUD’s public housing program “only have to meet eligibility income limits when they are admitted to the program.”¹⁴⁶ HUD does not limit the length of time tenants may reside in public housing.

Public housing authorities were given the “discretion to establish and implement policies that would require families with incomes above the eligibility income limits to find housing in the unassisted market” in 2004. The housing authorities that OIG surveyed for its audit, however, choose to allow over-income families to continue residing in public housing.¹⁴⁷

Over 1,000 residents earning incomes exceeding the limit have been living in public housing for nine years or more.¹⁴⁸ Most of the higher income tenant households (17,761 or 70 percent) have been residing in public housing for more than a year.

“In contrast, HUD’s housing choice voucher program, which provides eligible families assistance in obtaining rental housing in the private market, has an annual income limit,” according to the OIG. “If a family can afford to pay an unassisted rent for 180 consecutive days, then the family’s participation in the program is terminated and the family’s voucher is made available to another eligible family in need of rental housing assistance.”¹⁴⁹

“Since the demand for housing assistance often exceeds the limited resources available, long waiting periods are common before a family obtains a public housing unit,” the OIG notes.¹⁵⁰

More than 800 over-income families and individuals are living in public housing in Alabama. One household reported income exceeding \$153,000 and at least six others were over \$100,000.¹⁵¹ One man earning \$110,000 a year pays just \$550 to live in public housing. “I

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make minimum wage, and I wish I did make enough money to get my family out,” says Alabama resident Todrick Davis.¹⁵²

In Maryland, one HUD subsidized household was earning more than \$141,000 while others were making more than \$139,000, \$115,000, and \$108,000.¹⁵³

Responding to the public backlash to the audit findings, HUD spokesman Jereon M. Brown said the department “is taking additional steps to encourage housing authorities to establish policies that will reduce the number of over income families in public housing,” but stopped far short of saying over-income individuals would be removed from public housing to accommodate those less well off.¹⁵⁴

“There’s no regulation that we have to make them move, so we let them stay,” says Regina Anderson, the head the Summerville Housing Authority in Georgia, noting “they’re just happy where they are.”¹⁵⁵

“Why would we force them to move?” he asks Brian Griswell, executive director of a South Carolina regional housing authority, saying the over-income families are “role models for the rest.”¹⁵⁶

Not everyone uses the term “role model” to describe those who are well-off taking advantage of a program intended to help the needy. Lisa Morrow, a single mom who works

Overincome Families Compared to Families Waiting for Public Housing Assistance

Sequential number	Public housing authority	Number of overincome families	Number of families on waiting list
1	New York City Housing Authority, NY	10,250	302,079
2	Puerto Rico Public Housing Administration	1,219	74,240
3	Boston Housing Authority, MA	184	117,663
4	Virgin Islands Housing Authority	160	836
5	Newark Housing Authority, NJ	134	15,470
6	Jersey City Housing Authority, NJ	131	9,813
7	Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, CA	129	43,488
8	New Bedford Housing Authority, MA	100	1,219
9	Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency, TN	68	7,655
10	Housing Authority of the City and County of San Francisco, CA	20	7,172
11	Johnson City Housing Authority, TN	16	211
12	Lake Linden Housing Commission, MI	7	24
13	Housing Authority of Benson, MN	3	8
14	Housing Authority of Throckmorton, TX	2	8
15	Oxford Housing Authority, NE	2	4
	Totals	12,425	579,890

two jobs and whose son has Down syndrome, says “They ought to be ashamed of themselves. They really should.”¹⁵⁷

*More than a half-a-million low-income families await housing assistance while HUD subsidizes the rent of thousands whose incomes exceed the limit set to qualify for the help.*¹⁵⁸

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10 THE OTHER WHITE MEAT

Iowa
National Pork Board
\$3 MILLION

DC lobbyists are feeding at the trough of a Washington pork project that has pig farmers hogtied and squealing.

In a very unusual deal, the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) is bringing home the bacon from a government sponsored board for the sale of the slogan “The Other White Meat,” which was put out to pasture years ago.¹⁵⁹

The NPPC owns the rights to “The Other White Meat” slogan, which had been used as part of the National Pork Board’s campaign to increase pork consumption. The board agreed to pay \$3 million to the NPPC every year as part of a 2006 deal to purchase the slogan for \$60 million to be paid over 20 years.¹⁶⁰

The slogan was then retired in 2011 when the board adopted the new slogan, “Pork: Be Inspired.”¹⁶¹ The board, however, has continued to make the annual payment to the pork lobby “despite having the right to cancel the deal with a year’s notice.”¹⁶²

The National Pork Board, which is funded by mandatory fees imposed on hog farmers and others in the pork industry, was created by the “Pork Promotion, Research, and Consumer Information Act of 1985.”¹⁶³ The law created a “check off” requiring farmers and importers to pay 40 cents on every \$100 earned from the sale of hogs and pig products.¹⁶⁴ The fees collected for the board total nearly \$100 million a year.¹⁶⁵ The funds are intended to support research the promotion of pork products but are not permitted to be spent on lobbying.¹⁶⁶

This deal guarantees payments to a lobbying organization over two decades for the rights to a slogan with no intention of using it.

While the arrangement surely makes NPPC lobbyists as happy as pigs in mud, it has raised the eyebrows of the farmers who are being treated as piggybanks to pay the fees.

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Critics say it is a “payout” to the “industrial pork lobby that has long been closely tied to the board.” Many of the farmers who are paying the fees to finance the board maintain “the deal amounts to a scheme to let the board skirt anti-lobbying laws and promote an agenda directly against their interests.”¹⁶⁷

A coalition of small hog farmers and the Humane Society of the United States have joined forces to file a lawsuit “to undo the deal and recoup the millions of dollars already paid for the defunct ‘other white meat’ slogan.”¹⁶⁸

Small farmers “see the rich payments for a defunct slogan as an egregious example of the government taking their money and then letting it be siphoned off to an industry group.”¹⁶⁹ Critics say the two entities “are essentially colluding through a deal that lets the Pork Board funnel money to the NPCC by assigning an absurdly inflated value to the “other white meat” slogan; the money then goes to promote the NPCC’s lobbying agenda.”¹⁷⁰



The pork lobby is pigging out on federal funds collected from mandatory fees imposed on pig farmers. The National Pork Board is paying \$60 million to the National Pork Producers Council for the defunct slogan “Pork: The Other White Meat,” which was retired in 2011.

The cozy relationship between the board and the lobbying council was also highlighted by the USDA Office of Inspector General (OIG). “The Board has relinquished too much authority to its primary contractor, the National Pork Producers Council (NPCC), and has placed the NPCC in a position to exert undue influence over Board budgets and grant proposals,” the OIG reported in a 1999 report.¹⁷¹

The majority of hog farmers voted to eliminate the checkoff altogether in a referendum held in 2000.¹⁷² “A program that imposes mandatory assessments on pork producers and importers must have the demonstrable support of its participants in order to achieve the objectives of the law. The pork checkoff program does not have that support,” declared then-USDA Secretary Dan

Glickman who ordered the board to be shut down as soon as possible.¹⁷³ A lawsuit by the NPCC and a change in Administration saved the board’s bacon from the butcher’s ax.¹⁷⁴

The NPCC will spend about half-a-million dollars on lobbying this year,¹⁷⁵ which is just a fraction of the \$3 million annual sum it collects from the National Pork Board. While this money is not allowed to be spent on lobbying, Hugh Espey, the executive director of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement who is part of the lawsuit to recoup the payments made to the NPCC, says “it’s a shell game.”¹⁷⁶

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What no one can dispute is that the arrangement smells worse than a pig.

1 MONEY UP IN SMOKE

North Carolina and other states
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$119 MILLION

Uncle Sam just cannot kick the habit.

Taxpayers continue to subsidize the leading cause of death of Americans. While it costs billions to treat smoking-related health problems, the federal government is spending nearly as much to support the habit as it is to prevent it.



The Obama Administration exempted tobacco subsidies from across-the-board spending cuts required by sequestration.

Smoking cigarettes causes one in five deaths in the United States, making smoking the nation's leading preventable cause of death.¹⁷⁷ More than 480,000 deaths every year are attributed to smoking—more than the total number of fatalities caused by motor vehicles and firearm injuries, drugs and alcohol use, and HIV/AIDS combined.¹⁷⁸

Treating health problems caused by smoking costs the federal government more than \$90 billion a year.¹⁷⁹

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has spent about \$230 million on national anti-smoking ads since 2012 and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) launched its own two year, \$230 million anti-smoking campaign in 2014.¹⁸⁰ The National Institutes for Health (NIH) also

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spends money on projects to try to convince smokers to quit, such as the hipster parties profiled in entry #4 of Wastebook 2015.

Yet, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has spent more than \$1.1 billion over the past two years to subsidize and support the tobacco industry.¹⁸¹ The bulk of this was spent making the final direct income support payments to tobacco growers in 2014.

USDA expended more than \$119 million to support the tobacco industry in 2015.¹⁸² This includes more than \$69 million for direct income support payments and \$385,000 on administering those payments. Other amounts include: \$45 million by the Risk Management Agency for crop insurance, \$58,000 by the Agricultural Marketing Service for “market news reporting (collection and dissemination of auction market process and sales volume data),” \$261,000 by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture on research, and \$110,000 by the National Agricultural Statistics Service for tobacco crop condition, yield and production data collection.¹⁸³

As of July 1, 2015, payments could no longer be requested from the Tobacco Transition Payment Program (TTPP). These “buy out” payments were being made to those who previously received federal support from the tobacco marketing quota and related price support programs that were repealed in 2004.¹⁸⁴

Unlike other federal programs which have been subjected to sequestration, the Administration took the unusual step of exempting these tobacco payments from the mandatory across-the-board cuts even though the USDA Secretary acknowledged “funding for the TTPP is sequestrable.”¹⁸⁵

It originally had “determined that sequestration applies to these payments.”¹⁸⁶ The USDA Secretary stated that under the law “all budgetary resources are sequestrable unless exempt by the statute,” noting “no provision” of the law “exempts the TTPP from sequestration.”¹⁸⁷

The Administration then “reversed that decision” after some members of Congress lobbied for an exemption.¹⁸⁸ To get around sequestration, USDA simply delayed the full payments that would have otherwise been made the following year. In a letter to then-U.S. Senator Kay Hagan, the USDA Secretary explained the “funds sequestered in FY 2014 will become available in the beginning of FY 2015 to complete the final payment.”¹⁸⁹

If it had been applied, sequestration could have cut \$390 million in tobacco payments, according to the North Carolina Farm Bureau.¹⁹⁰ To achieve those required savings, deeper

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cuts had to be made instead to other federal programs and missions, like national defense and disease prevention, as \$119 million went up in smoke.

12

THE WORLD'S MOST EXPENSIVE GAS STATION

Afghanistan
Department of Defense
\$43 MILLION

The Pentagon spent nearly \$43 million to build “the world’s most expensive gas station.”¹⁹¹



No lines at this gas station! The Pentagon spent nearly \$43 million to build “the world’s most expensive gas station” in Afghanistan that dispenses compressed natural gas, which few automobiles in that country run on.

As if the price tag isn’t outrageous enough, the station located in the city of Sheberghan, Afghanistan dispenses compressed natural gas (CNG), which few automobiles in that country run on.

Furthermore, the Department of Defense (DOD) either cannot or will not provide any documentation to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) related to the project that can justify its construction or costs.¹⁹²

The contract to build the station, which includes two dispensers with four hoses, an administrative office building, and gas compression and processing equipment, was less than \$3 million. Yet, \$42,718,739 was spent for constructing and supervising the operation of the

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station.¹⁹³ SIGAR called the price “exorbitant,” “gratuitous and extreme,” noting a similar station cost no more than \$500,000 to complete in Pakistan.¹⁹⁴

Now that it is built, it serves little purpose since few automobiles in Afghanistan run on CNG and most Afghans cannot afford to convert their cars. It costs as much as \$800 to convert a gasoline-powered car to use CNG, while the annual income for an average Afghan is just \$690.¹⁹⁵

“This may explain why the U.S. Government paid for the conversion of over 120 Afghan vehicles to CNG so that they could use the filling station: ordinary Afghans simply couldn’t afford to do it. Not surprisingly, SIGAR found no evidence that any other vehicles were converted to CNG. “In the absence of national or even regional natural gas transmission and local distribution infrastructure to support a network of CNG stations, there is no incentive for motorists to convert their vehicles to CNG,” says SIGAR.¹⁹⁶

The project was funded by the Task Force for Stability and Business Operations (TFBSO), an \$800 million economic development program that reported directly to the Office of the Secretary of Defense which was shut down in March 2015.¹⁹⁷

The gas station has produced no discernable economic gains according to an economic impact assessment.¹⁹⁸

“It appear TFBSO never examined the feasibility of its CNG filling station project prior to committing millions of dollars to construction,” according to SIGAR. “TFBSO did not regularly conduct feasibility studies for their projects,” according to an engineer working for USAID on CNG projects in Afghanistan. “If TFBSO had conducted a feasibility study of the project,” SIGAR notes, “the Task Force might have noted that Afghanistan lacks the natural gas transmission and local distribution infrastructure necessary to support a viable market for CNG vehicles.”¹⁹⁹

“It is not clear why TFBSO believed the CNG filling station project should be undertaken,” concluded SIGAR. And DOD has not provided any documentation to make its decision-making any clearer.

While DOD does not dispute any of the facts uncovered about this project or TFBSO, the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Policy says the Office of the Secretary no longer possesses “the personnel expertise” to answer questions regarding the station or other TFBSO projects.²⁰⁰

“One of the most troubling aspects of this project is that the Department of Defense claims that it is unable to provide an explanation for the high cost of the project or to answer any other questions concerning its planning, implementation, or outcome,” notes SIGAR.

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“DOD’s position that it has no knowledge of the \$800 million program is startling and unconvincing.”²⁰¹

Documents obtained from the Afghan government indicate the business license of Qashqari Oil and Gas Services expired just six months after Qashqari purportedly began operating the filling station and has not been renewed.²⁰²

In January 2015, however, TFBSO reported that the firm “purportedly was licensed to operate the Sheberghan CNG filling station” and was going to start construction on another station in Mazar-e-Sharif. SIGAR was unable to find TFBSO documents supporting this statement and DOD says it is unable to answer questions related to this project.

“Frankly, I find it both shocking and incredible that DOD asserts that it no longer has any knowledge about TFBSO, an \$800 million program that reported directly to the Office of the Secretary of Defense and only shut down a little over six months ago,” wrote Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction John F. Sopko to Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter in October. “Nevertheless, I intend to continue our inquiry into TFBSO activities to shed additional light on how this program operated, what it achieved, how this enormous amount of money was spent, and whether any conduct by TFBSO staff or contractors was criminal in nature.”²⁰³

The questionable spending here is more than just one really, really expensive gas station, it is DOD’s assertion that it cannot answer any questions related to TFBSO and how it spent hundreds of millions of dollars.

“Unfortunately, SIGAR’s review of this project was hindered by DOD’s lack of cooperation. In its June 17, 2015, response to SIGAR’s letter requesting information, DOD contended that no one remains at the Department who can answer substantive questions about the CNG project, or, apparently, about any other TFBSO activities. This implies that TFBSO operated independent of any internal DOD management and oversight. Yet TFBSO was created by the Deputy Secretary of Defense and throughout its existence reported directly to the Office of the Secretary. Moreover, it was dissolved only a little over six months ago. In fact, for the last seven months of its existence, TFBSO reported to the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Policy, who now says that no one in the Office of the Secretary knows anything about it. Under the circumstances, DOD’s position that it has no knowledge about this \$800 million program is startling and unconvincing. It is also a major concern because TFBSO was DOD’s principal vehicle for stimulating private sector investment in Afghanistan to build a stable and growing economy. An understanding of the successes and failures of TFBSO activities will be critical for Congress and the Administration when considering economic development activities during future contingency operations.”²⁰⁴

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As for the few motorists in Afghanistan who are driving a vehicle that runs on CNG, it isn't very likely that there will ever be lines to wait in at this station, that's if it can stay in business.

13 THE MOST WASTEFUL PLACE IN THE USA

Washington State
Department of Energy
\$1 BILLION

The Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington state is the most “wasteful” site in the country, in every sense of the word.

The 586-square-mile site is contaminated with hazardous waste leftover from the Department of Energy (DOE) nuclear weapons program and is widely regarded “the most contaminated place in the country.”²⁰⁵ It has been costing taxpayers \$1 billion every year, yet DOE will not even begin the clean-up of the complex—which could take decades—until 2039, making this the single most wasteful place in the country when it comes to squandering taxpayer money.²⁰⁶



The government's attempted clean-up of the nation's largest collection of hazardous waste has become as much of a mess as the site itself, costing nearly \$20 billion without any waste being treated to date.

After more than \$19 billion was spent on the project over 25 years without any waste ever being treated, the clean-up was suspended three years ago.²⁰⁷ Yet, the project continues costing about \$1 billion a year and the tanks holding the country's “largest collection of radioactive waste” are deteriorating, making it a growing threat to the environment and taxpayers.²⁰⁸

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Beginning in the 1940s as part of the Manhattan Project, nuclear reactors were built at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation to produce plutonium and nuclear materials. For forty years, “little attention was given to the resulting by-products—large amounts of radioactive and chemically hazardous waste—or how to safely dispose of these by-products.”²⁰⁹

Since 1989, DOE “has considered and abandoned several different approaches to treating and disposing of this waste but, to date, no waste has been treated,” according to the Government Accountability Office (GAO).²¹⁰

Bechtel National, Inc., was selected by DOE in 2000 to “design, construct, and commission a Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant (WTP) to treat and immobilize large quantities of this waste and prepare it for disposal.”²¹¹ But the project remains riddled with cost and schedule overruns as well as technical and management problems.²¹²

Back in 2000, the project was expected to cost \$4.3 billion and completed in 2011.²¹³ By 2006, the projected cost had nearly tripled to more than \$12.3 billion and the finish date pushed back to 2019.²¹⁴ The new delays will certainly increase the costs, but the “final cost will be impossible to determine until the technical issues are resolved and a new construction schedule set,” notes the *Los Angeles Times*.²¹⁵

The final cost of the clean-up and when, or even if, it will be completed is anyone’s guess. For its part, DOE says it “remains committed” to finishing the project.²¹⁶

DOE’s estimates for completion of the vitrification plant project “are not reliable because they do not meet industry best practices,” according to GAO.²¹⁷ “Without reliable estimates that reflect best practices, DOE may be committing to courses of action that will require undisclosed future resources and will commit DOE to project time frames it may be unable to meet,” GAO concludes.²¹⁸

Pointing to the dollars being misspent on “questionable procurement practices by the contractor and inadequate oversight by the Department,” U.S. Senator Ron Wyden from neighboring Oregon requested the DOE Inspector General investigate “wasteful contracting practices” at the Hanford WTP.²¹⁹ “Bechtel has suspend some 56 purchase orders for work and components associated with the Pretreatment Facility portion of the WTP valued at \$277 million if they were completed,” according to Wyden. “Continuing these purchase orders costs approximately \$5.3 million a year simply to pay for the expenses associated with keeping them in place, such as storing components that were ordered but will never be used.” These numbers reflect “only a portion” of the purchase orders.²²⁰

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The contractor justifies its procurement practices by claiming “it is important to note that many of the suppliers are small businesses, for which the suspensions are especially detrimental. Unlike larger businesses, they do not have excess cash flow readily available to buffer this risk.”²²¹ Apparently the company thinks taxpayers should instead buffer the financial risk in addition to the environmental risk resulting from the failure to complete the project.

The delays and safety concerns have also incited legal actions. After DOE missed “one legally binding milestone after another” resulting from a 2008 lawsuit, Washington state is “petitioning a federal judge to issue an order to compel the feds to make good on their requirements to ensure a safe and timely cleanup.”²²² Some workers at the site claim they have been “targeted for reprisals” after raising safety concerns have taken legal action.²²³ Donna Busche, a Bechtel employee whose “primary job was ensuring compliance with dangerous waste permits and safety documents,” says she suffered retaliation and then was fired in February after making a safety complaint about the site in 2011 and then filing suit as a whistleblower with another worker.²²⁴ Last year, another DOE contractor at the site was ordered to rehire an employee who was fired “for voicing nuclear and environmental safety concerns, a violation of federal whistleblower provisions,” by the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration.²²⁵

With \$19 billion already sunk into the clean-up that won't actually begin for nearly two decades and could take decades to complete, this project is the most wasteful use of taxpayer money in the country.

Meanwhile the aging underground tanks that hold 53 million gallons of hazardous radioactive waste—some of which have already leaked—continue to deteriorate and threaten the groundwater and the nearby Columbia River.²²⁶

The government's attempted clean-up of the hazardous waste has become as much of a mess as the site itself.

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14 PRADA FOR YOUR POOCH

Maine
Department of Housing and Urban Development
\$210,000

Fashion-conscious dogs can get dressed to the *canines* thanks to financial assistance from the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs (HUD).

Maine Stitching Specialties, which produces Dog Not Gone pet products, received a \$210,000 Community Development Block Grant that will be spent “for more equipment and working capital for a logistics person to do preproduction and cutting work, as well as hiring a marketing and sales manager.”²²⁷

The company designs dog vests and accessories for L.L. Bean and Orvis,²²⁸ including leashes and collars as well as the collar kerchief, which is “styled after a traditional bandana.”²²⁹ Vests and kerchiefs are available in hot pink, neon green, and blaze orange.²³⁰ The company also makes vests for horses with polished metal buckles.²³¹ The company boasts that its dog vest is “considered by many dog owners to be the finest product available today. The exclusive double Velcro closure, extremely durable components, double stitching and American craftsmanship ensure lasting performance under the toughest conditions.”²³²



Pet-a-porter fashions: This pup is sporting a hot pink No Fly Zone vest, which is also available in blaze orange and neon green.²³³

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Whether in a hot pink collar kerchief or a neon green vest, these *pet-a-porter* fashions will make every dog ready to go for a walk on the catwalk.

The fabric used in the products is “manufactured to repel ticks and other insects – hence the No Fly Zone name,” explains Bill Swain, who along with his wife Julie, owns Maine Stitching Specialties and Dog Not Gone Products.²³⁴

*Dressed to the canines: Adorned in a blaze orange collar kerchief, this dog is ready to take a walk on the catwalk.*²³⁵

“Our pet products line is poised for rapid growth – we’re expecting to double sales this year,” said Swain. “We’re on the cusp of some large customers. If these large customers come through, we’re going to need a lot more help.”²³⁶

The HUD grant is not the first help the company has fetched from taxpayers. Two years ago, Maine Stitching Specialties received a Small Business Administration loan.²³⁷

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15 CLOUD CITY ON VENUS

Virginia
NASA
\$279,000

A city in the clouds, floating in the gassy atmosphere above an alien planet.

Has the return of *Star Wars* to the silver screen caused an awakening in the force at NASA?

The science fiction space adventure that took place a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away seems to be the inspiration to create a “cloud city” above Venus similar to the one in *The Empire Strikes Back* where Han Solo was frozen in a block of carbonite.

NASA’s High Altitude Venus Operational Concept (HAVOC) would begin by sending a robot into the atmosphere of Venus to “check things out” with the goal of establishing “a permanent human presence there in a floating cloud city.”²³⁸



A solar powered airship approaches the cloud city floating over Venus in this NASA concept sketch.

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NASA engineers and scientists the Systems Analysis and Concepts Directorate at NASA's Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia are presently "working on a preliminary feasibility study on how robots and humans could make a Venus mission a reality."²³⁹

NASA's Space Mission Analysis Branch speculates "a lighter-than-air vehicle can carry either a host of instruments and probes, or a habitat and ascent vehicle for a crew of two astronauts to explore Venus for up to a month."²⁴⁰

Instead of landing, astronauts would glide through the planet's upper-atmosphere in an inflatable helium-filled, solar powered airship called a VAMP (Venus Atmospheric Maneuverable Platform).²⁴¹ VAMP is being designed by Northrop Grumman "to be inflated and deployed on orbit and 'float' like a leaf into Venus's atmosphere, where it could operate for more than year."²⁴²

"Eventually, a short duration human mission would allow us to gain experience having humans live at another world, with the hope that it would someday be possible to live in the atmosphere permanently," says aerospace engineer Christopher A. Jones of the Space Mission Analysis Branch.²⁴³

A "blimp city" floating in a habitable area 30 miles above the inhabitable planet would eventually house the permanent manned settlement.



The Millennium Falcon approaches Cloud City hovering above the gas planet Bespin in The Empire Strikes Back.

The proponents of the HAVOC mission note the voyage "requires less time to complete than a crewed Mars mission."²⁴⁴

While that may be true, the few probes sent from Earth that have landed on Venus did not survive longer than two hours due to the planet's extreme temperatures that exceed 880 degrees Fahrenheit.²⁴⁵ "Venus is covered by a thick, rapidly spinning atmosphere, creating a scorched world with temperatures hot enough to melt lead and surface pressure 90 times that of Earth (similar to the bottom of a swimming pool 1 ½ miles deep)," according to NASA.²⁴⁶

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The atmosphere bursts with lightning while active volcanoes spew sulfur ash and “hurricane-force winds” circle the planet at a speed of 224 miles per hour.²⁴⁷

But a manned NASA mission to Venus—or anywhere else—faces even harsher realities back on Earth. Since the retirement of the Space Shuttle fleet in 2011, NASA has no manned space vehicle. As a result, the U.S. space agency is dependent upon Russia to transport astronauts to the International Space Station.²⁴⁸ To reach Venus, HAVOC relies on a “Space Launch System, which may not be ready to fly until the late 2020s.”²⁴⁹

Will NASA push the launch or ejection button on HAVOC? Difficult to see. Always in motion is the future.

While \$279,000 was spent designing the HAVOC blueprints,²⁵⁰ “NASA has no current plans to fund the concept.”²⁵¹ But the Langley-based team “continues its work with the hope the space agency could make the plan come to fruition.”²⁵²

NASA should instead focus on getting astronauts above the clouds of Earth again and get their heads out of the clouds of Venus.

10

POLITICAL PARTIES IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan
United States Agency for International Development
\$21.5 MILLION

George Washington warned about the potential threats political parties posed to the new American republic in his Farewell Address.²⁵³ “The common and continual mischiefs of the spirit of party are sufficient to make it the interest and the duty of a wise people to discourage and restrain it,” our first president wrote. “It agitates the community with ill founded jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, foment occasionally riot and insurrection.”²⁵⁴

Thomas Jefferson went so far as to declare “If I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all.”²⁵⁵

More than 200 years later despite the entrenchment of parties in the U.S. political system, Americans still do not look upon partisan factions very favorably. By and large, most

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have not viewed either the Democrat or Republican Party favorably since 2010 and today both parties are viewed favorably by less than 40 percent of the electorate.²⁵⁶ “The descent to sub-40 percent ratings for both parties marks a new low in an already inauspicious trend,” notes Gallup.²⁵⁷

Americans are not alone in their distaste for political parties.

“Pakistanis distrust most parties, which they believe lack democratically developed policies and are driven by the personal interests of an out-of-touch leadership,” according to a report by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).²⁵⁸

Yet, USAID provided \$21.5 million for a Political Party Development Program in Pakistan to help shape and build parties in the country.²⁵⁹ This included development of party policy platforms and communications training for party bosses and grassroots members for eleven different political parties.²⁶⁰

The program has been riddled by mismanagement and its resources have not been spent “wisely.”²⁶¹ Its activities have “largely stalled” and it is “doubtful the program would achieve its objectives,” according to a review conducted by the USAID OIG.²⁶²

“As a result of the many impediments, the mission’s goal for political parties in Pakistan to adopt inclusive, well-informed, and democratic policy-making and governance processes may not be attainable during this program,” in which case the money that has already been “disbursed will have been wasted,” concluded the USAID OIG.²⁶³

The review identified a long list of problems, including low quality forums, poor attendance rates, unorganized workshops, ineffective program monitoring, errors in performance data, and failure to undergo a required financial audit.²⁶⁴

The greatest threat to the future of the program, however, is not its mismanagement, but rather the lack of interest from the very political parties it is intended to help. Party leaders have had a “tenuous commitment to the program” and “grassroots members said that they were not sure whether they would get their leaders’ support to attend the remaining activities.”²⁶⁵ The OIG notes “the parties’ continued involvement was in doubt.”²⁶⁶

It’s time to turn the lights out on this program and declare that this party’s over.

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17

WINE CLASSES FOR MINORS

Washington State
National Science Foundation
\$853,000

Wine glasses don't typically come to mind when most parents and students think of science classes, but the National Science Foundation (NSF) is serving up a whole new meaning for STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education.

While underage drinking is a concern for high schools and colleges across the country, in Washington state an emphasis is being placed on getting kids interested and involved with wine making before they are legally old enough to drink alcohol.



The National Science Foundation is serving up a whole new meaning of STEM education with a wine making curriculum targeting minors for high school and college students.

With the financial backing of an \$853,000 grant from NSF, Yakima Valley Community College is expanding its Vineyard Technology and Winery programs to two other schools in the state.²⁶⁷

"The colleges are developing articulation agreements creating pathways from high school through baccalaureate programs. This project will also create a science-, technology-, and mathematics-rich training opportunity for current employees in the wine grape industry," according to the NSF award abstract.²⁶⁸ "A career pathway will be formalized for students in articulated high school courses to move into technical certificate,

Associate degree, and Bachelor's degree programs. The college partners are working with the Washington wine industry to provide practicum sites for hands-on-learning activities not

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THE FARCE AWAKENS

obtainable on some of the college campuses as well as increased internship and work experience opportunities, which further strengthen graduates' competencies in the discipline."²⁶⁹

Students don't have to fear a pop sobriety test either. Washington state allows underage minors who are 18- to 20-year-olds "to taste wine while they are enrolled in a community- or technical-college program teaching viticulture, enology or culinary arts."²⁷⁰ The Walla Walla Community College's enology and viticulture program "requires students to try as many as 600 wines a year."²⁷¹

Because the "collaborating colleges will share resources and develop new online and hybrid curricula,"²⁷² there probably is no need to fear that students experimenting with wine making at one of the colleges would have to drive to one of the other schools for their next class.

Yakima Valley Community College has had a Vineyard and Winery Technology Program since 2007 that teaches students wine maintenance, blending and bottling and the wine they produce is sold at the on-campus tasting room Yakima Valley Vintners.²⁷³

The NSF is not the only federal agency backing wine STEM education in the state. With the assistance of a \$2.06 million grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, Washington State University dedicated a new wine science center this year.²⁷⁴

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18 DATING SECRET OF THE UNATTRACTIVE

Illinois
National Science Foundation
\$276,000

It is the plot of nearly every teen movie: The geek who impossibly tries to catch the attention of an attractive classmate and through persistence—along with a series of embarrassing and awkward encounters and exchanges—eventually succeeds. It seems unrealistic, but there may actually be some weird science behind this classic John Hughes plotline.

Federally funded research looked at 167 couples from Illinois to determine how those who are less attractive ended up with a partner who was noticeably more attractive.

And the secret is pretty simple: Time.

According to the findings “partners who become romantically involved soon after meeting tend to be more similar in physical attractiveness than partners who get together after knowing each other for a while.”²⁷⁵

“If we start dating soon after we meet, physical attractiveness appears to be a major factor in determining such decisions, and we end up with somebody who’s about as attractive as we are,” says Eli Finkel, co-author of the study and professor of psychology at Northwestern University’s Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences. “If, in contrast, we know the person for a while before we start dating—or if we’re friends first—physical attractiveness appears to be much less important, and we are less likely to be similar to our spouse on the dimension of looks.”²⁷⁶

“As people get to know each other more intimately and across various contexts, their opinions about the other person’s desirability change, making objective physical attractiveness less relevant in determining whether the two individuals become a couple,” according to the researchers.²⁷⁷

This research was supported in part by two National Science Foundation grants,²⁷⁸ one of which totaled \$276,194.²⁷⁹

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To conduct the study, each of the couples was videotaped talking. The videos were then viewed by “coders” who “used rating scales to indicate the physical attractiveness of each partner.”²⁸⁰ The coders rated each of the partners “on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely)” on five characteristics:

How physically attractive is he/she?
How sexy is he/she?
How dominant is he/she?
How confident is he/she?
How masculine is he/she?

The researchers note, “yes, it is ‘masculine’ for both the man and woman.”²⁸¹

There was “a high level of agreement on the physical desirability of each partner” among the coders.²⁸²

The results revealed “the longer the romantic partners had known each other before dating, the less likely they were to be matched on attractiveness.”²⁸³

“For example, the pairing of an unattractive woman with an attractive man was more likely to emerge if the partners had known one another for many months prior to dating. Partners who began dating within a month of first meeting each other showed a strong correlation for physical attractiveness. But the correlation was much lower for partners who had known each other for a long time before dating. A similar pattern emerged when the researchers looked at whether pairs were friends before they started dating; friends-first couples were less likely to be matched on attractiveness than couples who were strangers before dating.”²⁸⁴



So being friend zoned doesn’t have to be game over. It just calls for extra innings.

Weird science? Spending a Saturday in an all-day detention results in the unlikely pairing between the criminal and the princess and the athlete and the basket case after they look beyond their first impressions and get to know each other better in *The Breakfast Club* (which marked its 30th anniversary of release this year). John Hughes’ teen romantic

comedy plot formula may actually be backed up by federally funded research.

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19

JAZZ PLAYING ROBOTS

Arizona
Department of Defense
\$2 MILLION

Drop beats, not bombs.

That is the goal of a Department of Defense effort to teach robots how to play jazz music.

The *Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA)* is spending \$2 million to hire a team of musicians and researchers to develop musical machines including robots capable of performing a trumpet solo and jamming with human musicians.²⁸⁵



The Pentagon is spending \$2 million to teach robots how to play jazz music.

Known as the Music Improvising Collaborative Agent (MUSICA), the system—it is hoped—will be “capable of musically improvising with a human player.”²⁸⁶

The team working on the project is led by jazz musician Kelland Thomas and includes researchers from the University of Arizona, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Oberlin College.²⁸⁷

“We may be the first musicians ever funded by DARPA,” laughs Thomas.²⁸⁸

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“The goal of our research is to build a computer system and then hook it up to robots that can play instruments, and can play with human musicians in ways that we recognize as improvisational and adaptive,” explains Thomas.²⁸⁹

Over the next five years, the team will attempt to develop “a robot that can manipulate musical instruments and accompany human musicians on stage.”²⁹⁰ Rather than simply “following chord progressions programmed into it, MUSICA will take cues from a long history of jazz royalty, including the great geniuses of improvisation, Miles Davis, Charlie Parker and John Coltrane. The software will play collaboratively, as if it were a human musician jamming at an open mic.”²⁹¹

“We’re getting lots of video of musicians playing in front of a green screen together,” says Thomas. “We’re going to build a database of musical transcription: every Miles Davis solo and every Louis Armstrong solo we’re going to hand-curate. We’re going to develop machine learning techniques to analyze these solos and find deeper relationships between the notes and the harmonies, and that will inform the system – that’ll be the knowledge base.”²⁹²

The real test for success is when the robot stops sounding like Miles Davis and starts “producing something that sounds new.”²⁹³

A robot capable of playing music is not a new idea. Mason Bretan, a PhD student from Georgia Tech, has been “jamming alongside ‘Shimi’ robots, which can partially improvise” and engineers “from Japan to Germany are already building robots you can program to play pre-written songs.”²⁹⁴

“I think DARPA’s interested in a program that will interact with humans,” speculates Thomas. “Right now, a computer waits for us to tell it what to do. The idea [with MUSICA] is that the computer can communicate with us the same way we communicate with it. It might be able to anticipate needs or ask us for clarification on a goal, then help us plan that goal for the future.”²⁹⁵ The aim of the program is to “make computers more of an equal collaborator,” Thomas said.²⁹⁶ The long term goal is to create artificial intelligence by teaching computers how to be “more human” in thought and expression by jamming to jazz.²⁹⁷

“In my mind, jazz and improvisation in music represent a pinnacle of human intellectual and mental achievement,” says Thomas. “The ability to, on the fly and in the moment, create melodies that are goal-directed, that are going somewhere, doing something and evincing emotion in the listener, is really, really amazing.”²⁹⁸

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20 DROUGHT SCULPTURES

California
National Science Foundation
\$2.6 MILLION

Could the solution to California's drought be found on a desert planet in a galaxy far, far away?

On Luke Skywalker's home world of Tatooine, *moisture* vaporators harvested humidity from the atmosphere of the arid planet that orbited two suns. Borrowing from this science fiction concept, a team of artists and scientists financed by the federal government are proposing similar structures to harvest water from the atmosphere on Earth.²⁹⁹

It is all part of the "Art of Science Learning" initiative funded by a \$2.6 million grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF)³⁰⁰ that "uses the arts to spark creativity in science education and the development of an innovative 21st Century STEM workforce."³⁰¹

Art of Science Learning "uses the arts to spark a more creative approach to tackling a variety of problems such as water resources in San Diego, urban nutrition in Chicago and transportation alternatives in Worcester, Mass. Teams use jazz improvisation, visual and spoken word poetry to help develop new ways of solving problems."³⁰²

As part of the project, the San Diego Incubator for Innovation assembled a diverse group of 100 "Innovation Fellows" of all ages, interests and professions in arts and science.³⁰³

The Innovation Fellows began meeting in 2013 for "daylong Saturday sessions that involved different arts disciplines applied to specific elements of the innovation process, whether opportunity identification (free jazz), opportunity analysis (movement), idea generation and enrichment (poetry and collage) or idea selection (sculpture)."³⁰⁴

"Open-ended jazz improvisation allows Fellows to practice their observational skills and encourages them to 'suspend disbelief' as they strive to identify opportunities within the challenge domains. Laban-based movement work helps Fellows learn to 'feel numbers' and bring openness to their search for productive convergence around shared insights. The Fellows use visual and spoken word techniques derived from the Surrealists to engage the flow of

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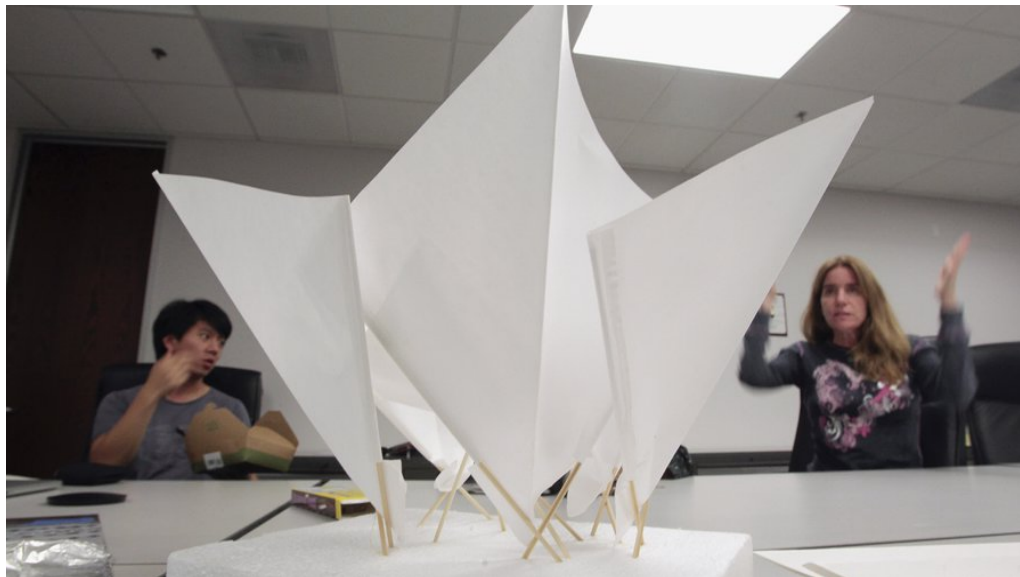
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intuitive insights in their ideation, and clay sculpture as a medium for modeling their ideas and assessing how they ‘stand up.’”³⁰⁵

An online poll decided the challenge that most needed innovative solutions in the San Diego area. “Water — or to be specific, how the region, which imports 90 percent of its water, can ensure a reliable, sustainable, high quality water supply’ — was the overwhelming choice.”³⁰⁶

For the past two years, one of the teams, nicknamed “the Dewers,” has been attempting to design a sculpture that “squeezes moisture from the atmosphere.”³⁰⁷

“Our mission as a ‘Dew Collector’ team is to create visually compelling works of art that combine science and design to explore innovative solutions to problems such as the water shortage in California,” the Dewers grant proposal states. “Our sculptures may be an important step in the awareness of water conservation. They also serve as a functioning unique, accessible and creative contribution to water collection. This work raises awareness about the water shortage by engaging the public with art and science concepts.”³⁰⁸ Brown yards and fields, dried up rivers and ponds, and water restrictions are more than sufficient to raise awareness of the drought for most residents.



The team is trying to develop “a conceptual sculpture that would measure no more than three-by-four feet” designed in “origami-inspired geometric shapes to maximize the surface area.”³⁰⁹

*A model of a sculpture intended to catch dew.*³¹⁰

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While the idea is interesting, “the technology is not entirely new.”³¹¹ In fact, it’s being used in South and Central America to pull water from fog banks.³¹²

But will the sculptures collect as much moisture in the semi-arid climate of southern California? The Dewers are hoping to extract “up to one gallon of water daily per 300 square feet per night under favorable conditions.”³¹³

Some of the other ideas proposed by San Diego Incubator for Innovation teams included an app designed to inspire “beautiful and water-smart landscape designs embodying San Diego lifestyles” and a video game “designed for students to experiment with the water system by manipulating variables and seeing the consequences.”³¹⁴

The other communities involved in the project took on different challenges. In Chicago, for example, a comic book was designed about the city’s urban nutrition challenge. “Using words and illustrations, [*City in a Garden*](#) explores the history of Chicago and the age-old challenge of feeding the world.”³¹⁵

While creative thinking is critical to dreaming up and developing innovative solutions to all of the problems facing our nation and the world, it is difficult to see how comic books will feed the world or how video games or sculptures will satisfy California’s thirst for water.



Are moisture vaporators, pictured here, that harvest moisture from the atmosphere of Luke Skywalker’s home planet Tatooine in Star Wars, the inspiration for the NSF funded concept for sculptures that collect dew?

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21

ORANGE RIVER

Colorado
Environmental Protection Agency
\$8 MILLION

A river in Colorado was turned orange and rivers in three states were contaminated with toxic sludge unleashed from an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) clean-up of an abandoned mine in August.³¹⁶ Now the EPA—which was warned twice about the potential for such a risk—is spending millions of dollars to clean-up the mess-up it caused to the environment.

A blowout triggered by excavation work at the Gold King Mine released three million gallons of toxic waste into the Animas River.³¹⁷ Drinking water, recreation, and tourism spanning hundreds of miles of rivers in Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah have been impacted.^{318 319}

At one site, EPA found lead “3,580 times higher than federal standards for human drinking water. Levels of arsenic were more than 24 times the exposure limit for fish and 823 times the level for human ingestion. Cadmium was found at more than six times the aquatic limit, 33 times that for humans.”³²⁰ While the orange streak dissipated, the metals have settled into riverbeds over the toxic plume’s 300 mile journey to Lake Powell, which is a major supplier of water for the Southwest.³²¹



The cost to clean-up an EPA mess-up that turned a Colorado river orange and dumped toxic sludge into hundreds of miles of rivers in three states is expected to exceed \$8 million.

The spill was caused by Environmental Restoration LLC, a Missouri-based contractor conducting the clean-up at the mine. The project is being funded by EPA’s Superfund budget, even though Gold King mine is not designated as a Superfund site. Environmental Restoration has received \$381 million in federal contracts since 2007, including \$37 million for EPA projects in Colorado.³²² The company is one of the top “environmental firms in the country,

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with revenue estimated at close to \$80 million,” according to the *Wall Street Journal*.³²³

Two separate reports, including one prepared by the contractor, warned the EPA that such a situation could occur. A June 2014 work order for the clean-up called attention to conditions in the mine “that could result in a blowout of the blockages and cause a release of large volumes of contaminated mine waters and sediment from inside the mine.”³²⁴ A May 2015 action plan prepared by Environmental Restoration also indicated the potential for a blowout.³²⁵ The site’s 71-page safety plan, however, included just a few lines about what to do in case of a spill.”³²⁶

Colorado Attorney General Cynthia Coffman pointed out the EPA’s plan “indicates there was an understanding of what might happen and what the potential consequences were. We don’t know whether they followed the plan.”³²⁷ She said “I want to give the EPA the benefit of the doubt here. I really want to do that. It’s getting harder.”³²⁸

To date, the agency has spent about \$8 million as a result of the spill.³²⁹ The cleanup’s final cost is expected to grow and take years to complete.³³⁰



The Southern Ute Indian Tribe has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to provide clean water to its members and livestock and without much assistance from the EPA.

“We’ve been working on obtaining a reimbursement from the EPA for all of our expenditures,” said Southern Ute Chairman Clement Frost. “So far, it’s added up to about \$200,000, and we still have more to be reimbursed from this disaster.”³³¹

“The EPA never lifted a finger to let us know what was going on,” Frost said.³³² “We’re concerned because this was a man-made effort by the EPA,” Frost noted. “This was not a disaster caused by our Creator.”³³³

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An official with the Navajo Nation expressed similar concerns and frustrations with the EPA. The federal agency created a “culture of distrust” with the Navajo following the accident says Donald Benn, the executive director of the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency.³³⁴ Benn says the EPA “has made repeated missteps in their response efforts relating to the incident triggered by their own actions” and believes “no other environmental bad actor would be given this same amount of leeway to investigate itself and determine to what extent it will be held accountable.”³³⁵

“This is a huge tragedy,” concedes Dave Ostrander, the EPA’s regional director of emergency preparedness assessment and response. “It’s hard being on the other side of this. Typically we respond to emergencies; we don’t cause them.”³³⁶

22

BEER: FOREIGN FOOD AID

Vietnam
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$68,000

When your mother told you to eat everything on your plate when you were a child because there were starving children in Asia, she probably could not have imaged our foreign food aid to the continent would include craft beer and booze.

But that is exactly what a U.S. agricultural assistance program to help countries meet food needs is delivering.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Cochran Fellowship Program provides assistance to developing countries and emerging democracies to “develop agricultural systems necessary to meet the food and fiber needs of their domestic populations” and strengthen trade linkages with the United States.³³⁷ It does so by hosting “agricultural professionals from middle income countries” in the United States to “receive hands-on training to enhance their technical knowledge and skills in areas related to agricultural trade, agribusiness development, management, policy and marketing.”³³⁸

This year, the program sponsored a U.S. Craft Beer, Wine, and Spirits training program for a team from Vietnam that included bar hopping and vineyard visits.³³⁹

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The Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) implemented the initiative which included eight Vietnamese beverage importers, distributors, and restaurant owners and cost \$68,129.³⁴⁰

The intent “is to identify new beer, wine and spirits products available for export to Vietnam and improve the understanding of the production and quality of these products and the goal of the program is greater market expansion for new US beer, wine and spirits products and increased U.S. exports.”³⁴¹

The USDA worked closely with the U.S. Brewer’s Association to design the program.³⁴² The Oregon Wine Board, the Washington State Wine Commission, the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, the Wine Institute, and the Hop Growers of America also “gave input into the training program,” according to USDA.³⁴³

The Cochran Fellowship Program fellows attended the Great American Beer Festival held in Denver, Colorado in September.³⁴⁴ The event is “the premier U.S. beer festival and competition” and boasts “the largest collection of U.S. beer ever served.”³⁴⁵



A USDA program designed to help other countries meet the food needs of their population includes attendance to the Great American Beer Festival.

The fellows also checked out vineyards in Washington and Oregon, distilleries in Kentucky and Tennessee,³⁴⁶ and went out to Hilliard’s Brewery in Seattle.³⁴⁷ “A visit to hops farms and meetings with the Hop Growers of America gave participants an opportunity to learn about the quality and availability of U.S. hop production,” according to USDA.³⁴⁸

The training topics included “production of beers and spirits, different varieties of beers, wines and spirits that will meet the tastes of the Vietnamese market, proper handling and storage (particularly with craft beers) and export regulations for these products.”³⁴⁹

USDA notes that as “the Vietnamese beer culture grows there is a greater demand for higher quality beers, wines and spirits in Vietnam.”³⁵⁰

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The program covered the costs of training fees, emergency medical insurance, domestic transportation, lodging and food for the Vietnamese fellows.³⁵¹

Next year, the Cochran Fellowship Program will be hosting fellows from India. “The subject areas to be covered for 2016 program will include strategies, techniques, fundamentals, principals of U.S. wine, distilled spirits and beer marketing, promoting and selling, as well as techniques to effectively communicate U.S. wine varieties and characteristics.”³⁵²

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23 LOVE AT FIRST SWIPE

Michigan
National Science Foundation
\$851,500

Do you believe in love at first swipe?

In today's terminology, "swipe right" means you are interested in pursuing a relationship based upon seeing a few pics and brief self-description. This phrase comes from the action taken on the popular dating app, Tinder, which allows users to peruse other singles in their area. When Tinder users view profiles, which contain photos, a brief bio, and shared interests on social media, they can either "swipe right" to indicate interest, or "swipe left" to move onto the next profile. When two users swipe right on each other, an official match is made, and communication can begin.

Wayne State University researchers are seeking to better understand how the rise of technology has affected dating by observing those looking for love online and how they decide to pursue a romantic connection.³⁵³ The study is being funded over the next three-and-a-half years with a \$851,462 grant from the National Science Foundation.³⁵⁴

"Online dating is one of the most popular ways for single Americans to meet a romantic partner," points out Stephanie Tong, Ph.D., who is leading the study.³⁵⁵ One-in-five adults between the ages of 25 to 34 have tried online dating.³⁵⁶

The study is "looking at how updated online dating technology affects the ways people initiate relationships and the ways they make decisions; when they decide who to date, and whether or not to pursue the relationship," explains Tong.³⁵⁷

The Wayne State University project seeks to "provide new insights regarding the ways that online dating systems are designed to facilitate interpersonal contact, impact the self-concepts of the people who use them, and it may provide new information and insights that can facilitate improvements to the design of popular forms of social computing technology."³⁵⁸ The researchers "will use scientific experiments, participant interviews and behavioral measurements."³⁵⁹

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“What we are really interested in is people’s attitudes and opinions of the algorithms of these systems, and how they affect the decisions they make, and how these decisions are going to change the relational landscape over time,” says Tong.³⁶⁰

Tinder keeps its own tabs on those who decide to swipe right and takes its mission of trying to connect compatible couples very seriously. “We know how addicting swiping on Tinder can be, but we’ve noticed that a small number of users only swipe right just to see who likes them back. These users diminish the fun for everyone else by creating low quality matches that never lead to conversations,” the company stated earlier this year announcing quality controls to better ensure that perfect match.³⁶¹ “To encourage people who right swipe like crazy to be thoughtful in their swiping, we’ve introduced an algorithm that intelligently limits the number of likes a user can make in a consecutive 12 hour period. Most of our users will never even encounter this limit or even know it exists, but we’ve already seen that those who encounter it are becoming way more thoughtful when swiping.”³⁶² This fall, the dating service revealed the “Most Right-Swiped” U.S. campuses—schools with the guys and gals “who received the most right swipes”—which it dubbed #TinderU.³⁶³

Based upon the preliminary results of the NSF study, Tong says “I’ve been surprised at how much people trust technology for something like romance, which is usually thought of as very serendipitous and a ‘just happens’ kind of thing. When it comes to romantic encounters, we’re finding people do trust these sites and algorithms a lot to help facilitate that process.”³⁶⁴

It is too bad taxpayers aren’t given the option to swipe left when they get sideswiped by unnecessary government spending on studies like this.



Uncle Sam wants you to swipe right and is spending nearly \$1 million to learn how those looking for love online decide to pursue a romantic relationship

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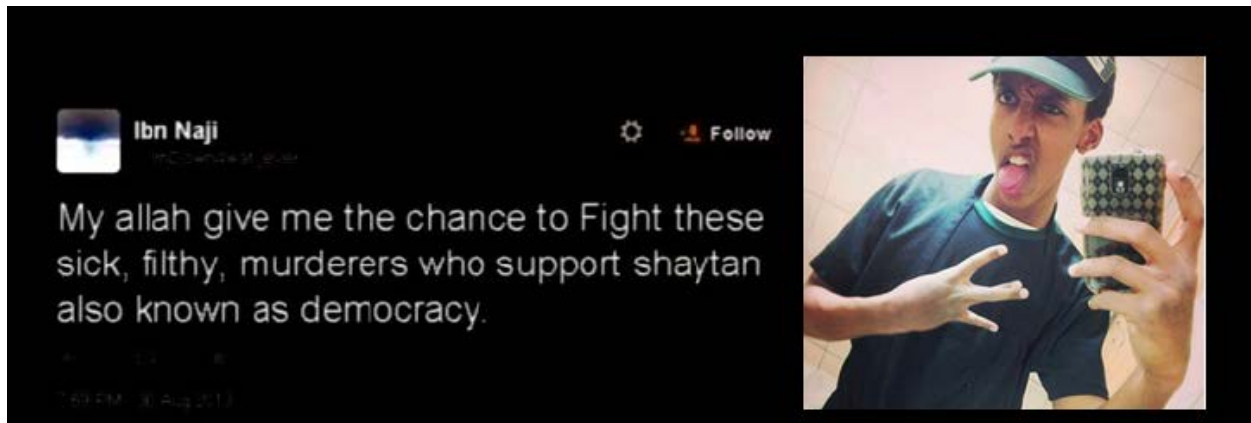
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24 MAJORING IN TERRORISM

Minnesota
Department of Education
\$2,000

Two young men from Minnesota spent federal student aid in an attempt to join the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or ISIL (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIS).³⁶⁵ Both were charged with “conspiracy to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization, namely, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” as well as financial aid fraud.³⁶⁶

Hamza Ahmed, 21, and Hanad Mustafe Musse, 19, “withdrew more than \$1,000 in federal financial aid funds to purchase international airplane tickets.”³⁶⁷ The pair were part of a group of “seven young Somali-Americans from Minnesota who face charges of planning to leave the United States and fight alongside Islamic extremist groups.”³⁶⁸



Hamza Ahmed, who tweeted his support for jihad, spent federal student aid to purchase plane tickets to travel to Syria to join the terrorist organization ISIL.

Musse pleaded guilty to conspiring to provide material support to the terrorist group in September.³⁶⁹ He “participated in several meetings throughout 2014 in which he and his co-conspirators discussed traveling to Syria to join ISIL, including how they would pay for such travel, what routes they could take from Minnesota to Syria to best elude law enforcement, and the feasibility of using fraudulent travel documents to travel to Syria,” according to the U.S. Department of Justice U.S. Attorney’s Office in Minnesota.³⁷⁰

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Ahmed had boarded his flight but was ordered off the plane by U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers.³⁷¹ Ahmed is being held without bail due in part to his threatening Twitter posts.³⁷² “Jihad is the number one deed or form of devotion to Allah,” he tweeted.³⁷³ In another he wrote “I’ve always wanted to be a martyr.”³⁷⁴ In yet another, he pleaded “Ya Allah give me the chance to Help and fight for the Muslims in Syria.”³⁷⁵

Both had been students at the Minneapolis Community & Technical College (MCTC). Ahmed’s lawyer “wants him to continue his education, either by re-enrolling in his courses or taking online classes at MCTC or at another college.”³⁷⁶

A MCTC spokeswoman “couldn’t discuss the subjects of the investigations” but said the school “was cooperating with law enforcement.”³⁷⁷



The abuse of federal student aid money by the pair of community college students is not a onetime anomaly. Organized fraud rings and con artists have been ripping off the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) program for years. In a single year, the Department of Education Office of Inspector General estimates “more than 34,000 participants in crime rings improperly received federal student aid.”³⁷⁸ Federal student financial assistance is an attractive target for criminals because it does not require a credit check and has “few restrictions on how the money can be spent.”³⁷⁹

Criminals “have concentrated on community college programs due to their low tuition,” which leaves extra money that can be easily misspent with little if any accountability, notes the American Association of Community Colleges.³⁸⁰

“We can’t control how students spend,” notes a director of financial aid at one community college. “Ultimately if they qualify for funding, it is theirs to spend.”³⁸¹

Because there is little accountability over how federal student aid money is spent, it is not difficult to spend the money to join ISIS or other nefarious purposes.

Coincidentally, one of the terrorists who carried out the Boston Marathon bombing, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, received more than \$5,500 in educational aid including Federal Pell Grants and Cash (ACCESS) Grants to attend two different community colleges in Massachusetts.³⁸² It is not known, however, that he used any of the student aid to support the bombing that killed three spectators and wounded more than 260 others.

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25 TRAVELING CIRCUS

Kentucky
Small Business Administration
\$8,500

Did you hear the one about the governor of Kentucky running away with the circus?

It's not a joke.

What is really not funny is Kentucky is spending your tax dollars to pay for a traveling circus.

Circus Mojo of Ludlow, Kentucky has received \$8,500 from the Small Business Administration (SBA) State Trade and Export Promotion (STEP) program.³⁸³ The group is spending the money to “export its entertainment, education and community development services.”³⁸⁴

This circus is not traveling around packed in a clown car either. Circus Mojo accompanied Governor Steve Beshear on his 2015 Canada Trade Mission.³⁸⁵ While there was a fee for the trip, the STEP grantees received discounted prices.³⁸⁶ The funds also “allowed the organization to exhibit at World Trade Day in Louisville.”³⁸⁷

Mojo Circus had to travel this year because the theater building where it performs was found in violation of nine fire codes in April and the owner could not produce a Certificate of Occupancy.³⁸⁸

The Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development administers the STEP program.³⁸⁹ In total, the state received \$400,000 in STEP funding this year.³⁹⁰ Governor Beshear's office says the grant money will “lower the cost for small businesses wanting to participate in international trade missions, sales trips and subscription services provided by the U.S. Commerce Department” and “assist companies with international marketing campaigns, export trade show exhibits, training workshops or other export initiatives.”³⁹¹

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“You will not find a more international business than the circus,” says Circus Mojo founder Paul Miller.³⁹² “These funds will continue our global reach while impacting our local economy.”

Not everyone thinks this is a laughing matter. Pointing out that the program is unnecessary, President Obama asked Congress to zero out funding for the STEP program in his Fiscal Year 2016 budget proposal. “U.S. small businesses have access to counseling and training on exporting topics through SBA programs which assist small businesses who seek to execute a new-to-export strategy or expand into additional export markets; therefore, the SBA does not request funding for the STEP cooperative agreements in FY 2016.”³⁹³

With Washington juggling real national priorities on a fiscal tightrope, we cannot afford to clown around wasting money on silly programs like this.



The governor of Kentucky ran away with the circus to Canada and the circus laughed all the way to the bank with taxpayer money.³⁹⁴

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26 MILLION DOLLAR MANSION MAKEOVER

Massachusetts
Federal Emergency Management Agency
\$180,000

A Massachusetts vacation home has been *transformed* into a million dollar mansion, with the financial support from a bankrupt federal program that is billions of dollars in debt.

“Once a small cottage,” the house located on 48 Oceanside Drive in the seacoast town of Scituate was “renovated and expanded” with nearly \$1 million in “insurance payouts and government grants over the past four decades.”³⁹⁵ “It is now a 4-bedroom, 3.5-bathroom house. The structure was first raised about 3 feet with a \$40,000 federal grant about a dozen years ago.” This year, the mansion is being elevated five feet higher at a cost of \$180,000 to taxpayers.³⁹⁶ The house was purchased for \$1 million in 2007 and the current owner lives in Florida.³⁹⁷



The million dollar mansion at 48 Ocean Drive in Scituate, Massachusetts received \$180,000 this year from the National Flood Insurance Program, which is \$24 billion in debt.

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There are about 150 houses in Scituate that “are hit so often they are designated ‘severe, repetitive loss properties’ by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which administers the national flood-insurance program. Most of these homes in the town of 18,000 people have received at least four payments from the federal flood-insurance program.”³⁹⁸

Because the million dollar mansion on Oceanside Drive “is situated on the frontline of New England’s losing battle with the sea,” it has become the “symbol” of federal flood insurance policies that financially support the rebuilding of homes on the ocean’s edge with tax dollars, no matter how vulnerable they are” to damage from severe storms or the ocean, says the New England Center for Investigative Reporting (NECIR).³⁹⁹

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) is weathering a rising tide of red ink and is currently \$24 billion in debt.⁴⁰⁰ The program was recently revised to provide owners 100 percent reimbursement for the price of elevating their homes. This “has been controversial because many homes along the coast are owned by the wealthy and the flood-insurance and elevation grant programs do not look at income as a basis for reimbursement.”⁴⁰¹

And those with higher value homes are often paying lower premiums. “Across Massachusetts, wealthier communities, with higher-value properties, in general pay hundreds of dollars less in premiums than their lower income neighbors under the National Flood Insurance Program,” according to a study issued by the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth in June.⁴⁰²

“In Edgartown on Martha’s Vineyard, where stately homes and oceanfront retreats have lured sea captains, celebrities and even vacationing presidents, homeowners pay an average of about \$1,400 annually in flood insurance premiums, less than many other coastal Massachusetts communities. Yet, in Fairhaven, a blue collar community that shares its harbor with New Bedford, the owners of more modest homes pay an average of nearly \$1,800 a year, nearly one-third more than the rich and famous on the Vineyard,” the *Boston Globe* reported.⁴⁰³

“The reasons for the disparity in costs aren’t entirely clear,” according to the study’s author Chad McGuire.⁴⁰⁴

What is clear is the bankrupt government insurance program is stuck with the bills for upgrades and maintenance of expensive homes located in high risk locations and this taxpayer protection is incentivizing home ownership in such storm and flood prone areas.

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“Since the insurance costs are low relative the value of the property, it encourages people to build in some of the most hazardous areas, even as rising sea levels increase the risk of flooding,” observes McGuire.⁴⁰⁵ “It gives the greatest subsidy to the most expensive properties,” McGuire said. “There may be a lot of reasons for it, but the effect is still the same.”⁴⁰⁶

“The way the federal flood insurance is administered now, there is a threat to public safety, a threat to public tax dollars and a threat to the environment by rebuilding in these vulnerable places,” says Jack Clarke, director of public policy and government relations for the conservation organization Mass Audubon.⁴⁰⁷

But there is one group that benefits, “the owners of more expensive property on Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket and along the South Shore in well-to-do communities such as Scituate,” where the million dollar mansion on Oceanside Drive faces the sea.⁴⁰⁸

27 SLUM LORD SUBSIDIES

Tennessee
Department of Housing and Urban Development
\$60 MILLION

Federal officials blocked safety inspections of public housing in Tennessee owned by a slumlord who has been collecting millions of dollars in taxpayer money while his residents have been living in deplorable conditions with broken pipes, exposed electrical sockets and infestation with roaches, bedbugs, and rodents.

Global Ministries Foundation (GMF) received more than \$60 million in subsidies from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) last year to provide public housing at Goodwill Village and Warren Apartments in Memphis.⁴⁰⁹ GMF was founded by Reverend Richard Hamlet,⁴¹⁰ who is the agency’s President and CEO.⁴¹¹ GMF also owns apartment complexes and rental properties in seven other states through its housing subsidiary, GMF Preservation of Affordability Corp.⁴¹² Hamlet is paid a \$485,000 salary and 60 percent of GMF’s spending paid for salaries with less than twenty percent spent on missionary work, according to an analysis by an investigative reporter.⁴¹³

The apartments at both Memphis locations were deemed to be in “deplorable conditions,” according to Tennessee Housing Development Agency (TDHA)

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executive director Ralph Perrey, who said “nobody should be living like that, nobody should be living like that in housing especially that the taxpayers have helped to build and are helping to maintain.”⁴¹⁴

HUD last sent code inspectors to the property in 2010⁴¹⁵ and HUD officials in Washington, DC have blocked the state from conducting its own safety inspections.⁴¹⁶

John Gimmell of HUD Memphis told a local news station that “the inspections did not happen in the correct sequence because of a renovation at Goodwill Village in 2010,” but “residents want to know what got renovated.”⁴¹⁷

An investigation by *The Commercial Appeal*, a Tennessee newspaper, found “GMF failed to repair and maintain the buildings” and “Hamlet moved about \$9.2 million from GMF’s low-income housing nonprofit to its religious nonprofit.” The newspaper reported that “the federally subsidized apartments, which were built more than 30 years ago, are in need of significant repairs. There are broken windows and doors, leaking roofs, mold, broken toilets, poor sanitary conditions, holes in the walls made by rats. One tenant told the newspaper she used a stove for heat this winter. In some units, there are bedbug and roach infestations and even fleas, according to code enforcement violation records.”⁴¹⁸

Laquita Phipps told FOX13 News that she has reported the problems with mice to the leasing office, but nothing was done. Her four children huddle up with her in a room at night because “they too scared to sleep in their room” because they are afraid of the mice, Phipps said, admitting “I’m scared of the mice too.”⁴¹⁹

Trenisha Harris, who receives federal housing assistance, was homeless before she moved into Goodwill Village. She called her landlord, the city, and even the Department of Housing and Urban Development asking for help. Her daughters have been bitten by bedbugs with one having to be taken to the hospital after having an allergic reaction. Harris called the city’s 311 hotline to report the “epidemic of bedbugs, roaches and mice,” but the “operator told her they couldn’t do anything about it” and “the city doesn’t deal with infestations.”⁴²⁰

FOX13 News heard from other residents with similar problems, but “most of the residents didn’t want to talk on camera as they are afraid the apartment managers will try to evict them if they complain publicly.”⁴²¹

Because the residents are receiving federal housing assistance, Phipps thinks no one cares about their situation. “They feel like since we income based we just, we don’t mean anything,” she said. “We nothing.”⁴²²

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The Mid-South Peace and Justice Center, which is assisting the residents organize a tenants association, says “GMF are slumlords of the worst kind.”⁴²³

The poor conditions could have been avoided, according to Perrey, if not for “Washington-based decisions” that blocked state inspectors who would have spotted the problems before they got so bad.⁴²⁴ “TDHA conducted onsite physical inspections called Maintenance and Operations Reviews of Section 8 properties like Goodwill, according to Perrey, until about few years ago” when they were “told not to do those Management and Operational Reviews.” Perrey says “the kind of scrutiny that we would normally be able to apply to a lot of those properties we have actually been told you can’t do that and so we haven’t.”⁴²⁵ The state housing agency offered to resume inspections, but “were met with firm opposition.”⁴²⁶

“It is very frustrating,” lamented Perrey. “We have a team of professionals that has done this job well” and “we offered to continue a certain amount of inspections to the extent we could and we were told by legal in Washington you can’t do that. You won’t do that,” said Perrey.⁴²⁷

HUD finally stopped blocking inspections after the local media exposed the appalling conditions of the residents. The HUD inspectors declared five units as “uninhabitable” and city inspectors “deemed another 40 units at the two complexes unfit.”⁴²⁸ The apartments were boarded up and the department forced GMF to temporarily relocate the displaced families into hotels.⁴²⁹

There are more than 600 units in the two apartment complexes.⁴³⁰ Both “failed an overall inspection” by HUD.⁴³¹ The department is re-evaluating “its 10-year contract with Hamlet’s firm.”⁴³²

Perrey says Washington is “going to have to come up with a different way to award these contracts, but, in the meantime, we’ve been in limbo operating the program on a series of rolling three month extensions.”⁴³³

After the condition at the GMF apartment complexes began attracting the attention of the media and government officials, Hamlet initially apologized to residents who had been living in deplorable living conditions. “I want to apologize for the tough conditions you have been living in for decades now. Everyone is right—the media the tenants, in the community—nobody should have to live under these conditions,” Hamlet said in April.⁴³⁴

Weeks later, he was complaining, saying “we were put in a very difficult situation” by being told to move the residents out of the uninhabitable apartments and filed an appeal

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contesting the failing scores given to the GMF properties.⁴³⁵ Hamlet said GMF wants a “clean slate” and to continue to work with HUD to provide public housing.⁴³⁶

While the mission of GMF is “to multiply Gospel centered missions, mentoring, and monies around the globe, for the glory of God and the eternal welfare of mankind,” those living at Goodwill Village “say they could use some missionary work at their homes.”⁴³⁷

28 **A PERFECT TWEET**
New York
National Science Foundation
\$2.6 MILLION

Retweet this if you think this project is a waste of tax dollars! Plz.

Researchers have discovered the secret to the perfect tweet and have created a site to rate how well-crafted your tweets are.

The project was funded with part of a \$2.6 million National Science Foundation continuing grant⁴³⁸ and additional support from Google.⁴³⁹

Previous studies found the dominant factor for being retweeted “is not what you write, but how many followers you have. Basically, a famous person can write anything and it will be retweeted. An unknown person can write the same tweet and it will be ignored.”⁴⁴⁰

But since not everybody is famous, how can the average Twitter user increase the likelihood of a message being retweeted?

Researchers at Cornell University compared nearly 1.8 million pairs of tweets from the same 236,000 Twitter users on the same topics—but written differently—and concluded “wording still matters.”⁴⁴¹

Using their findings, an algorithm was developed to evaluate potential tweets to predict which is more likely to be retweeted. Twitter users can compare potential tweets using the algorithm online at <https://chenhaot.com/retweetedmore/>.⁴⁴²

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According to the algorithm's analysis, for example, the statement "Retweet this if you think this project is a waste of tax dollars!" has a 92 percent "chance of being better" than the same idea worded as "Can you believe this silly project was funded with your tax dollars??"⁴⁴³

The researchers identified nine rules to improve Twitter users' chance of being retweeted:

- 1) Ask people to share your message: Plz retweet.
- 2) Be informative. Length often helps.
- 3) Conform to the expectations of your audience by using familiar language while being true to yourself. "Although distinctive messages may attract attention, messages that conform to expectations might be more easily accepted and therefore shared."
- 4) Imitate newspaper headlines. "News headlines are intentionally worded to be both informative and attention-getting."
- 5) Use words contained in other retweeted messages.
- 6) Use positive and negative words.
- 7) Refer to other people, rather than just to yourself. Use third person pronouns.
- 8) Be general. "Movie quotes are more shared in the culture when they are general enough to be used in multiple contexts."
- 9) The easier to read, the better.⁴⁴⁴

Since the question of how to best make a "successful" message is important for the framing of issues by political parties, the researchers note politicians should have an interest in the findings of their work.⁴⁴⁵ "An important type of success is achieved if the national conversation adopts the rhetoric of the party."⁴⁴⁶

No matter how you tweet it, this is #wasteful.

Retweeted more

The green version has a(n) 92% chance of being better.

Retweet this if you think this project is a waste of your tax dollars!
<https://chenhaot.com/retweetedmore/>

Can this believe this silly project was funded with your tax dollars??
<https://chenhaot.com/retweetedmore/>

"Retweet this if you think this project is a waste of tax dollars" is better worded than "Can you believe this silly project was funded with your tax dollars?" concluded an analysis of successful message wording made possible with funding from the federal government.

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THE FARCE AWAKENS

29

VA EXECS: MORE MONEY LESS WORK

Department of Veterans Affairs
\$1.8 MILLION

Senior executives at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) abused their positions to create plum assignments with higher pay and less responsibility and to charge taxpayers for their moving expenses. Ironically, one of the corrupt managers was being relocated to clean up a regional office already beleaguered by scandal.

An investigation conducted by the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) determined two senior staffers in particular, Diana Rubens and Kimberly Graves, “inappropriately used their positions of authority for personal and financial benefit when they participated personally and substantially in creating opportunities for their own transfers to positions they were interested in filling.”⁴⁴⁷ Two other VA managers were “coerced” to leave those positions against their will so that Rubens and Graves could take their jobs.⁴⁴⁸

Rubens and Graves then inappropriately abused the VA’s relocation expense program (PCS program) to charge taxpayers for their moves. A federal agency may pay relocation expenses for an employee if “the position is likely to be difficult to fill in the absence of an incentive.” Clearly this was not the case with these positions since the occupants were manipulated into vacating them in the first place.⁴⁴⁹

Graves used her authority to oust the then-director of the St. Paul Veterans Affairs Regional Office (VARO) to unwillingly leave his job so she could nab his position. “Mr. Antione Waller, former St. Paul VARO Director, told us Ms. Graves initiated discussion with him about relocating to the Philadelphia VARO,” the OIG found. “Once he expressed a willingness to accept the reassignment, she did an apparent ‘bait and switch.’ She told him that the Philadelphia position was no longer available and he would be considered for the Baltimore VARO Director position.” When he stated his unwillingness to move to Baltimore, he was told “his name was already submitted to the VA Secretary for Baltimore, so ‘saying no now is not a clean or easy option.’”⁴⁵⁰ Graves, who was the Director of the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Eastern Area Office, then nabbed the Director of the St. Paul VARO position with the VA paying \$129,500 to cover her moving expenses.⁴⁵¹

WASTEBOOK

THE FARCE AWAKENS

Rubens “inappropriately used her position of authority for personal and financial benefit when she participated personally and substantially in creating the Philadelphia VARO vacancy and then volunteering for the vacancy,” according to the OIG investigation.⁴⁵² Then-Under Secretary for Benefits Allison Hickey who helped secure the move for Rubens claims she was picked “to clean up the Philadelphia office, which had its own scandal that included discarded veteran mail and rodent-infested, unsafe working conditions.”⁴⁵³ The department paid \$274,000 for Rubens move when she was reassigned from her position as Deputy Under Secretary for Field Operations to Director of the Philadelphia and Wilmington VA Regional Offices. Despite taking a position two levels lower on the VA’s pay scale with a maximum annual salary of \$167,000, Rubens’ retained her \$181,497 salary.⁴⁵⁴

In total, the VA spent about \$1.8 million on salary increases and moving expenses for 23 Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) senior execs reassigned in fiscal years 2013 through 2015.⁴⁵⁵ All but two of these new jobs included pay raises.⁴⁵⁶ The average pay increase was \$15,286 for the 23 reassignments examined by the OIG, for an annual total of \$321,000.⁴⁵⁷

The OIG points out “an agency cannot make a determination whether a position is difficult to fill if the agency does not actively search for or consider applicants for the position.”⁴⁵⁸ Yet, vacancies were not even announced or the positions were filled before those who applied were considered for five of the moves.⁴⁵⁹

The VBA management used the moves of Senior Executive Service (SES) “as a method to justify annual salary increases” and “inappropriately utilized” the PCS program “to pay moving expenses for these employees,” the OIG concluded.⁴⁶⁰

One of those who benefitted from a transfer, Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits Danny Pummill, conceded it was “probably true” that “salary increases and relocation incentives were a way to get around pay freezes and bans on performance bonuses.”

The taxpayer-funded relocations may result with some of these employees moving again, this time out of the federal workforce and possibly into a federal courthouse, or worse. While the OIG recommended that the VA consider taking disciplinary action against Hickey for her role in the relocation schemes,⁴⁶¹ she resigned in October.⁴⁶² The OIG “made criminal referrals to the U.S. Attorney’s Office, District of Columbia, regarding official actions orchestrated by Ms. Rubens and Ms. Graves. Formal decisions regarding prosecutorial merit are pending.”⁴⁶³

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THE FARCE AWAKENS

30

HUD HOUSING HELP

Nationwide
Department of Housing and Urban Development
\$2 MILLION

Creating “quality affordable homes for all” is part of the stated mission of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).⁴⁶⁴

HUD is taking the “for all” part of that mission very personally.

The department has “reserved” \$5.5 million to pay for temporary housing, travel, and other costs for its employees who may be relocated.⁴⁶⁵

The cash is available “for everything from storage to airline tickets — and in some cases, the cost of home sales, which can be prohibitive in areas where many borrowers still owe more on their mortgages than their houses are worth.”⁴⁶⁶

“One HUD worker received about \$102,000 in relocation expenses, including \$30,000 for the cost of offloading his property and \$18,000 for temporary housing,” according to information obtained by the newspaper *Politico*.

In all, nearly \$2.9 million has been spent since 2013 to move about 125 HUD employees. The average cost paid per employee relocated is nearly \$23,000.⁴⁶⁷

HUD Secretary Julian Castro “has himself been raising questions about HUD’s spending on relocations. He turned down about \$14,000 offered by the agency for his own move to Washington last year because he said he thought it was too lavish.”⁴⁶⁸ HUD ended up spending just a fraction of the amount offered, about \$4,700, to cover Secretary Castro’s costs.⁴⁶⁹

Most of the \$2.9 million in relocation costs resulted from transferring employees as part of a major reorganization approved in 2013, according to HUD.⁴⁷⁰

More than \$2.2 million obligated for moves, however, has not yet been spent and “is being rolled over to cover any unanticipated costs going forward.”⁴⁷¹

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31

FAT SUIT

New Mexico
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$17,500

The federal government has been spending a lot of money over the years nagging Americans about being overweight. In a twist, it is now funding a five year “weight sensitivity training” program to encourage “empathy” and “social acceptance” of those who are overweight.⁴⁷²

The effort is being conducted by New Mexico State University (NMSU) with a \$17,500 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).⁴⁷³

The project will include an “Empathy Exercise in which a 20 lb. fat vest will be worn by participants for a minimum of 12 consecutive hours.”⁴⁷⁴ The “vest-like suit” is filled with “gel material” and “positioned around the body’s midsection.”⁴⁷⁵



The NMSU professor holds up the fat suit being worn to encourage “weight sensitivity.”

By wearing the fat suit, “individuals can experience some of the physical, social, and even psychological aspects of being overweight,” says NMSU professor of human nutrition Devon Golem, the study’s investigator. “Perhaps walking a mile in someone else’s weight will help change negative beliefs and attitudes.”⁴⁷⁶

While the project is intended to encourage acceptance of those perceived to be overweight, both the lead researcher and a participant in the

study confessed their own negative attitudes about appearing fat.

“I was self-conscious about my appearance in my workout clothes and noticed a couple of passers-by staring,” acknowledged Golem.⁴⁷⁷

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THE FARCE AWAKENS

A student who participated in the project by wearing the fat suit in public also admitted he felt “self-conscious about” his appearance, but noted no one “behaved negatively toward” him when he was wearing the fat suit.⁴⁷⁸

Golem would like to also explore “the need to reduce the emphasis on weight status as the only determinant of health and determining healthy behaviors. Being or appearing overweight does not equate to unhealthy practices.”⁴⁷⁹

Ironically, while the federal government has stigmatized unhealthy eating and is now trying to promote social acceptance of those who are overweight, it is also subsidizing the very junk foods linked to obesity. More than \$19 billion has been spent by the federal government to subsidize “junk food ingredients” over the past 20 years, according to an analysis conducted by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group.⁴⁸⁰

Cutting the fat in federal government seems like the best approach to getting back in shape.

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32 ZOMBIES IN THE WHITE HOUSE

Washington D.C.
National Endowment for the Arts
\$60,000

The last place you would expect to find brain-eating zombies is Washington, DC.

What won't surprise you is that the zombies are being subsidized by the federal government.

The Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company received a \$60,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) this year to produce a play titled "Zombie: The American."⁴⁸¹

The play "is a futuristic, dystopian fantasy set in 2063" with the United States facing "an imminent civil war, the threat of an African invasion, and zombies in the basement of the White House."⁴⁸²



A play funded by the NEA about brain eating zombies occupying the basement of the White House "bit off more than it can chew" and "decomposed into a hot mess."

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A late-night tour of the White House inspired the story. The playwright “was struck by its austerity, its lack of pomp or crown jewels.” He found it all to be “very sort of zombie-like,” which got him “thinking about our lack of government response on anything that’s actually important” and questioning “how are we also zombies?”⁴⁸³ And that is the deep message of the production: the zombies are us!

The point may have gotten lost in the play’s confusing twisted plotlines and messy production. The theater cautioned the audience to “please be advised” this show “contains strong adult content, sexual situations, nudity, and fog.”⁴⁸⁴

The reviews of the play stunk like a rotting corpse.

The Washington Post panned the play, saying it “decomposed into a hot mess.”⁴⁸⁵ Calling it a “mess” may be an understatement: The script’s stage direction states “Blood SPRAYS Everywhere. And I Mean EVERYWHERE . . . Get The Audience WET!”⁴⁸⁶

Another critic cautions “the zombies in this play eat not just brains, but livers, intestines, lungs, arms, tendons, hearts, and faces. Yet it is the script itself that seems to have bitten off more than it can chew.”⁴⁸⁷

Nevertheless, tickets were sold for as much as \$68 each.⁴⁸⁸

“Who doesn’t want to see a play called ‘*Zombie: The American?*’” laughed director Howard Shalwitz. “The title helps.”⁴⁸⁹

With brainless spending like this, brain-eating zombies shouldn’t pose any threat to Washington, DC.

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33 SHRIMP FIGHT CLUB

North Carolina
National Science Foundation/Smithsonian
\$707,000

Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee, and hit like a shrimp?

The mantis shrimp (Stomatopoda) may be a shrimp but judge him not by his size.

While just two to seven inches in length, the mantis shrimp boasts “two super-sonic bludgeons powerful enough to dismember” a crab or break through the shell of a clam.⁴⁹⁰ Fishermen call mantis shrimp “thumb-splitters,” for obvious reasons.⁴⁹¹

“The mantis shrimp has evolved this extreme weapon, which for its size is probably the most potent in the animal kingdom,” says biologist Roy Caldwell of the University of California at Berkeley.⁴⁹² “The force created by the impact of the mantis shrimp’s club is more than 1,000 times its own weight-- so powerful that David Kisailus who studies the shrimp at UC Riverside’s Bourns College of Engineering “needs to keep the animal in a special aquarium in his lab so it doesn’t break the glass.”⁴⁹³

Boxing is a way of life for mantis shrimp. These aquatic contenders exchange punches and blows in ritualized fighting called “telson sparring.”⁴⁹⁴

So what is a winning strategy for a mantis shrimp with its eyes on the championship belt in the world’s lightest weight class?

A shrimp fight club was created to find out.

Sixty-eight different Panamanian mantis shrimp were pitted in 34 separate contests to fight over an artificial burrow.⁴⁹⁵ Videos were recorded of the fights and a Duke University graduate student watched the matches.⁴⁹⁶ The winner was “defined as the individual that resided in the burrow after the other made a clear, directed retreat toward the edge of the arena.”⁴⁹⁷

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The effort was paid for as part of a \$706,800 grant from the National Science Foundation, researchers at Duke University.⁴⁹⁸ Additional support was provided through the Smithsonian's Tropical Research Institute.⁴⁹⁹



Duke University researchers created a shrimp fight club to observe the punching power of mantis shrimp, which engage in ritualized fighting with powerful hammer-like claws.

The researchers' initial theories ironically ignored the characteristic that makes the mantis shrimp so unique in the first place, which is that its size doesn't equal its power.

"Theoretical and empirical findings in aggressive behaviour research suggest competitors should resolve conflicts using signals before escalating to dangerous combat," postulated the researchers. They, therefore, predicted most contests would be resolved when the two shrimp sized each other up or with the larger combatant clobbering his opponent if a fight ensued.⁵⁰⁰

"When two mantis shrimps square off, they flare their arms to the side, in a threatening display called the meral spread."⁵⁰¹ The researchers "predicted that most conflicts should end there. The meral spreads should show off the size of each combatant's clubs, the size of the clubs should correlate with how forcefully they can strike, and the strength of those blows should be the deciding factor in any battle. With all that information readily available, the animals shouldn't ever need to escalate to actual blows. These predictions were wrong on every count."⁵⁰²

When pitted against each other, "the mantis shrimps almost always laid into each other, whether they used meral spreads or not. What's more, the spreads turned out to be terrible signals because the dimensions of the club don't accurately predict how hard its owner can hit."⁵⁰³

But Doug Emlen, a professor at the University of Montana and author of the book *Animal Weapons*, points out a flaw in the study that could have affected the findings—the mantis shrimp pitted against each other by the researchers were roughly the same size. "If the

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match-ups had been more random, the displays would have allowed larger males to deter smaller ones without needing to spar,” Emlen contends.⁵⁰⁴ “Lots of ‘fights’ never really turn into fights” in the wild, he notes.⁵⁰⁵

The researchers also found “strike force doesn’t correlate with victory. Instead, it’s the *number* of blows that matter. The winners aren’t the ones that hit the hardest, but those that keep on hitting.”⁵⁰⁶

The student and his biology professor concluded “it wasn’t the shrimp who hit hardest who won the bout, but the one who hit the most frequently.”⁵⁰⁷

They conceded “we predicted that (i) most contests would be resolved by meral spreads, (ii) meral spreads would reliably signal strike force and (iii) strike force would predict contest success. The results were unexpected for each prediction. Contests were not resolved by meral spreads, instead escalating to striking in 33 of 34 experiments. The size of meral spread components did not strongly correlate with strike force. Strike force did not predict contest success; instead, winners delivered more strikes. Size-matched *N. bredini* avoid deadly combat not by visual displays, but by ritualistically and repeatedly striking each other’s telsons until the loser retreats. We term this behaviour ‘telson sparring’, analogous to sparring in other weapon systems. We present an alternative framework for mantis shrimp contests in which the fight itself is the signal, serving as a non-lethal indicator of aggressive persistence or endurance.”⁵⁰⁸

In the movie *Fight Club*, Tyler Durden played by Brad Pitt asks “how much can you know about yourself if you’ve never been in a fight?”



This question can certainly be applied to the research on the shrimp fight club. To know and understand them requires observing their ritual fighting. But perhaps the more appropriate quote from the movie that puts federal funding for this study into perspective may be “we buy things we don’t need with money we don’t have.”

This quote from the movie Fight Club sums up the government spending profiled in Wastebook.

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34 NASA MISSION TO HAWAII

Hawaii
NASA
\$3 MILLION

“Don’t worry. Matt Damon won’t get stuck on Mars. NASA can’t get him there,” noted a *Washington Post* headline, referring to the movie “The Martian,” starring Damon as a stranded astronaut on the red planet.⁵⁰⁹

NASA may not be able to send Matt Damon to Mars, but it can pretend to.

The space agency is producing its own make-pretend series of voyages to Mars, not in a Hollywood studio, but in Hawaii. The set of the Hollywood studio where “The Martian” was filmed was probably a more accurate portrayal of the planet’s surface than Hawaii, but replicating life on Mars is not the point of this project.

The U.S. space agency is spending \$3 million on the 12-month Hawaii Space Exploration Analog and Simulation (HI-SEAS) program to observe how the members of the crew cope and get along living in tight quarters together for an extended period of time. It is part science fiction and part reality TV.⁵¹⁰

This is the true story of six scientists picked to live in a dome and have their lives taped to find out what happens when people stop being polite ... and start getting real.

And participants in the project do get real.

Conflicts arise between the participants, notes the principal investigator Kim Binsted.⁵¹¹ “One of the lessons is that you really can’t prevent interpersonal conflicts. It is going to happen over these long-duration missions, even with the very best people,” she said.⁵¹²

Part of this this experiment is observing how personal conflicts “affect a crew's well-being and abilities, as well as how best to ease tensions on an isolated Mars mission.”⁵¹³

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THE FARCE AWAKENS

“Besides conflict, another psychological issue that can have a profound effect on crew morale is boredom, especially once you pass the halfway point, leading to tensions between crew members and even depression.”⁵¹⁴

The first HI-SEAS experiment involved studies about cooking on Mars and was followed by a four-month and an eight-month co-habitation mission.⁵¹⁵

On the northern slope of a volcano on Hawaii’s Big Island, the crew is housed in a dome that is 36 feet in diameter and 20 feet high.⁵¹⁶ The space is cramped but the men and women have their own rooms. A space suit must be worn to go outside the dome.⁵¹⁷ The meals include powdered cheese and tuna.⁵¹⁸

While NASA does not currently have a manned space program, the agency optimistically hopes to reach Mars in the 2030s.⁵¹⁹ A manned Mars mission would last one to three years.⁵²⁰

NASA is spending \$1.6 million on the first four experiments, including the Hawaii project, and recently awarded an additional \$1.4 million for three future missions.⁵²¹



The Martian: NASA’s manned mission to Hawaii is part science fiction, part reality TV.

“That is very cheap for space research,” says Binsted.⁵²²

But not everyone in the space community is convinced of the project’s value. “I’m not a fan of the simulations,” says former NASA Astronaut Norman Thagard.

“You can never duplicate the fact that the real crew would be on a mission with a specific purpose, and these folks are just trying to live through a long-duration simulation.”⁵²³

While NASA’s mock mission to Mars in Hawaii may not have been as realistic as a real voyage to another place, the space agency was heavily involved with the production of “The Martian” to help make the fictional film as realistic as possible.

Director Ridley Scott “consulted with the space agency on everything from martian weather to space-suit designs.”⁵²⁴

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Scott called the agency in May 2014 seeking guidance and was put in touch with the director of the Planetary Science Division Jim Green— known as Dr. Mars at NASA. “Once I realized he was going to paint as accurate a picture as possible about Mars, I was all in,” says Green.⁵²⁵ “Over a period of a month, we answered hundreds of questions. We arranged a tour of the Johnson Space Center for production designer Arthur Max — he took thousands of pictures, clicked at everything for eight hours. We also sent hundreds of files of real images of Mars and images of control centers, down to what the computer screens look like.”⁵²⁶

NASA helped launch the film with screenings at its space centers and an out of this world premier at “the most remote theater in the known universe — aboard the International Space Station, 250 miles above the Earth’s surface.”⁵²⁷ *The Hollywood Reporter* declared “NASA proved it could pull off a PR stunt far greater than anything Hollywood could concoct, arranging on Sept. 27 — four days before the film’s release — to find liquid salt water on the surface of Mars. Talk about a publicity coup.”⁵²⁸

Without a manned space craft or the money to send astronauts to Mars, watching “The Martian” is likely to be the closest astronauts will get to Mars anytime soon. The \$15 movie ticket is a bargain compared to the \$3 million cost of this mission to nowhere.

35 PUNK ARCHIVE
Washington D.C.
Institute of Museum and Library Services
\$20,000

Has punk, the rebellious movement characterized by self-expression, loud music and a disdain for government, business elites, authority in general, and anything establishment, sold out?

Punk isn’t dead, but some fans may have missed its underlying message by accepting government money in an attempt to preserve it.

A D.C. Punk Archive commemorating the movement in the nation’s capitol containing records, zines, fliers, posters, tapes, set lists, and clothing “dating back to the city’s hardcore heyday in the 1980s” was created last October at the D.C. MLK Memorial Public Library.⁵²⁹

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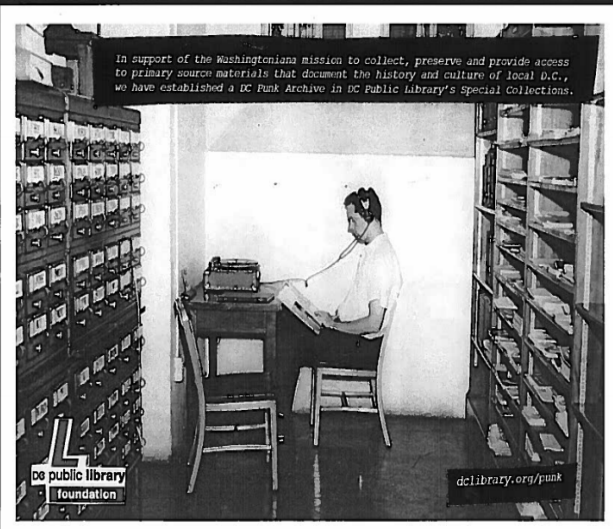
A \$20,000 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services is paying to “build a website with a timeline stretching from 1976 to the present” documenting the archive’s contents.⁵³⁰

“Some punk-rockers were surprised a government institution would take interest in” the project, the *Washingtonian* reports in a post headlined “With a little help from the man, a portrait of D.C. punk will soon be available to the masses.”⁵³¹

Thus far, the website, <http://dclibrary.org/punk>, doesn’t convey the edgy and defiant designs associated with punk. It is, rather, a bland homepage with a collection of scanned posters, fliers and other memorabilia that can be flipped through one at a time⁵³² and a spreadsheet of vinyl records, cassettes and CDs in the D.C. public library.⁵³³ Coincidentally, the University of Maryland located mere miles away has its own extensive “D.C. Punk and Indie Fanzine Collection.”⁵³⁴

Punk musician Sohrab Habibion’s music is featured in the D.C. Punk Archive and he says “I honestly can’t believe it,” exclaiming “my mom is thrilled.”⁵³⁵

KICKOFF SHOW FOR THE DC PUNK ARCHIVE
MLK JR MEMORIAL LIBRARY (901 G ST NW)



THURS, OCTOBER 2 FREE 6PM

JOY BUTTONS
*** FLAMERS**
*** HEMLINES**

Punk isn't dead, but some fans may have missed its underlying message by seeking government money in an attempt to preserve it.

Before a line-up of punk bands took the stage at a gig this summer in support of the archive project, a DC public library employee told the crowd “this is your government at work. These are your tax dollars at work.”⁵³⁶ The band Give then “jumped around the stage and whipped their hair,” self-censoring their songs for “the all-ages crowd.”⁵³⁷

Government subsidies. Parental approval. Censorship. Has punk been punk’d by the man?

London calling, it wants its punk back. And the taxpayers want their money back, too.

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36 CARTOONING IN INDIA

India
Department of State
\$35,000

Poverty and illiteracy are no laughing matter in India.

About three-fourths of the 300 million households surveyed as part of India's latest Socioeconomic and Caste Census (SECC) live in villages. "Of this rural population, less than 5 percent earn enough to pay taxes, only 2.5 percent own a 4-wheeler vehicle and less than 10 percent have salaried jobs. Not only does rural India have miserable statistics on income and asset ownership, its literacy rates are low. Only 3.5 percent of students graduate and around 35.7 percent of residents can't read or write."⁵³⁸

Faced with these daunting challenges, the U.S. Department of State chose to spend up to \$35,000 this year to promote cartooning in India.⁵³⁹

The U.S. Consulate General Chennai spent the money to host editorial cartooning workshops entitled "Cartooning for a Cause," targeted towards print and broadcast journalists, bloggers, citizen journalists, and journalism students.⁵⁴⁰

"These workshops will focus on sharing ideas on the role of editorial cartooning in India and the United States in creating public dialogue on a range of topics i.e. climate change, energy security, gender-based violence, intellectual property rights and freedom of speech and expression."⁵⁴¹

"India, like the United States, has a rich history of cartooning," noted the grant announcement.⁵⁴² "Even with the advent of the Internet, animation and digital technology, cartoons are still used very effectively by intellectuals in both countries and around the world today. It is important that the next generation keeps this tradition of cartooning alive and makes it relevant to the 21st century."⁵⁴³

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BACK TO THE FUTURE DAY

New York
National Science Foundation
\$185,000

October 21, 2015 is the day Marty McFly travels to in the 1980s science fiction film classic *Back to the Future Part II*. This year, the date became known as “Back to the Future Day,” with fans celebrating the future day that is now in the past.

Ithaca College in New York tapped an \$185,000 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to host its own “Back to the Future Day” featuring action figures from the movie floating on hoverboards.⁵⁴⁴ A hoverboard is like a skateboard without wheels that levitates, famously featured in the *Back to the Future* sequels.

“In honor of the 30th anniversary of the film,” Associate Professor Matthew Sullivan “showed off the power of superconducting magnets — which are used to object levitate — by dressing up the magnets as a DeLorean and Marty McFly. He then ‘flew’ the McFly action figure through a model of the cemetery, complete with a grave marker for Doc Emmett Brown — even though that never happened in the movie.”⁵⁴⁵

“If a fan gets really upset,” Sullivan said, “then I would know we arrived.”⁵⁴⁶

In addition to Back to the Future Day, Sullivan holds other entertaining events paid for with the NSF grant intended to bring “the spectacle of the science to the public.” His lab “has tracks — from loops to circuits — to use for demonstrations such as the ‘Back to the Future Day’ or having a toy ghost hover in a model graveyard.”⁵⁴⁷

“There’s money set aside in my grant to pay for building these sorts of demonstrations to bring superconductivity to a broader audience,” Sullivan said.⁵⁴⁸

The NSF grant is supporting otherwise practical physics research into superconductors, which is “the technology need to make hoverboards.”⁵⁴⁹

NSF did not provide a specific dollar amount spent for the “Back to the Future Day,” but noted “the majority of planned time and materials costs will be devoted to research.”⁵⁵⁰

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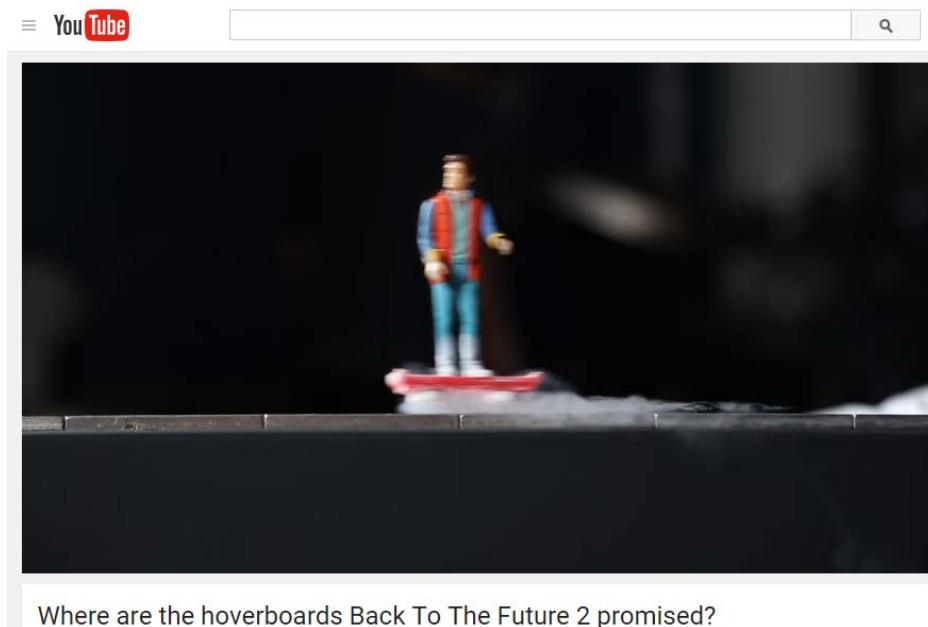
A condition of the grant is to outline a broader impact of the work, including ways the research will affect the world beyond.”⁵⁵¹ This is being done with the demonstration in his lab as well as videos on YouTube.⁵⁵² NSF calls the project’s outreach “impressive and remarkable,” noting its “broad impact provided by YouTube videos.”⁵⁵³

“Thought you’d celebrate the real Back to the Future Day with a ride on your hoverboard or in your flying car? Sadly, that’s not going to happen in time for Wednesday; but the levitating technology Marty McFly encountered in his jaunt through Oct. 21, 2015 during the 1989 film ‘Back to the Future II’ isn’t as far-fetched as it might seem,” says the Ithaca College YouTube channel introducing Sullivan’s explanation of how a working hoverboard could become reality.⁵⁵⁴ He says flying cars and hoverboards “can be done with technology that we have today just so long as underneath all of the roads that he is on—underneath all of those—is either a lot of metal or a lot of magnets.”⁵⁵⁵

But having to construct special roads to make cars fly never happened in the movie either. As Doc Brown noted in *Back to the Future Part II*, “Roads? Where we’re going, we don’t need roads.”

Despite all of the fanfare marking Back to the Future Day, fewer than 500 people viewed the YouTube video produced by Ithaca College.⁵⁵⁶

While it is important to make science interesting and fun, siphoning resources away from research that could advance our knowledge and improve technology will likely have taxpayers exclaiming “Great Scott!”



Back to the Future Day, funded by the National Science Foundation, featured a levitating model of Marty McFly on a hoverboard and a YouTube video.⁵⁵⁷

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38 'HOW TO USE A LAWYER' GUIDE

Vermont
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$728,000

Lawyers probably don't immediately come to mind as beneficiaries of agriculture subsidies, but a Vermont law school is harvesting federal farm aid to plant the seeds of future lawsuits.

A "How to Use a Lawyer" guide will be prepared by the Vermont Law School with support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Agricultural Library (NAL).⁵⁵⁸



Vermont Law School is producing a "How to Use a Lawyer" guide with funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The initiative was highlighted as one of the future projects to be undertaken by the law school when it announced it was awarded a \$728,000 USDA grant.⁵⁵⁹ This brings total USDA funding for Vermont Law School's Center for Agriculture and Food Systems (CAFS) to \$1.5 million.⁵⁶⁰

CAFS is "committed to creating real-world tools for people and planet, and we are thankful for the USDA funding and National Agricultural Library support that enable us to continue this vital

work," says the director of CAFS.⁵⁶¹

The law school promises "these resources will be made widely available, both on partner websites and at the National Agricultural Library".⁵⁶²

Coincidentally, the American Bar Association already provides a "When and How to Use a Lawyer" manual.⁵⁶³

This frivolous funding should be ruled out of order as arbitrary and capricious and dismissed.

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39

BANKRUPT BOONDOGGLE

**Pennsylvania
Economic Development Administration
\$581,000**

Once touted as a “success story” of government investment,⁵⁶⁴ “a catastrophic financial disaster” could be the final result of millions of public dollars poured into an economic development project in a Pennsylvania municipality,⁵⁶⁵ and the only one likely to financially benefit from the mess is an out-of-town attorney.

Ford City, Pennsylvania received over \$3 million to transform an abandoned industrial site into a commercial and recreational area that would include “a business incubator” and “a museum paying tribute” to the area’s heritage of glass making.⁵⁶⁶ This included a \$581,000 Financial Assistance Award from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) in September 2000 for a Heritage and Technology Park (HAT).⁵⁶⁷

The project became defunct when the Greater Ford City Community Development Corp. (CDC) went bankrupt in 2008. Created “as a conduit for grant funds” to “revive the local economy by bringing businesses to the area,” the CDC was being investigated by the FBI for its use of federal funds. Nearly \$2.4 million in debt,⁵⁶⁸ CDC was also in default of its mortgage payments.⁵⁶⁹ The bank foreclosed on CDC and the site was sold off in a sheriff’s sale in 2010.⁵⁷⁰

As a condition of receiving the EDA funds, Ford City was required to retain ownership of the property until 2017. Now in violation of the grant’s terms of agreement, EDA demanded the money be repaid.⁵⁷¹

Ford City did not accept an EDA offer to settle the debt for just \$116,000 made in October 2014.⁵⁷² The EDA has now turned the matter over to the Treasury Department which is seeking payment of \$590,000, which includes penalties, interest and administrative charges,⁵⁷³ to be made in monthly installments of \$16,389 over the next three years.⁵⁷⁴

Council President Kathy Bartuccio called those amounts “unimaginable” and claims that repayment plan would “force the borough into a catastrophic financial disaster.”⁵⁷⁵

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The town, instead, countered with a plan to repay the grant in \$1,000 increments over 50 years, which the EDA flatly rejected.⁵⁷⁶

In a letter sent to EDA Interim Regional Director Tonia Williams on August 21, Bartuccio said “Ford City Borough does not have the financial resources to pay \$581,000 and doing so may very well force the borough to enter into Act 47 (considered ‘financially distressed’ in the eyes of the State). Having \$336,000 to operate borough government for the next eight months is no easy task.”⁵⁷⁷

Ford City officials have decided to simply not repay the taxpayer money.⁵⁷⁸ “We’re not going to pay,” Borough Manager Eden Ratliff said defiantly.⁵⁷⁹

The cash strapped municipality is, instead, hiring an attorney “to address any issues that arise with the matter.”⁵⁸⁰ At a special meeting in September, the council voted 5-0 to hire Pittsburgh attorney William Bercik as “special legal counsel to defend the borough in matters regarding the grant default.”⁵⁸¹ He will be paid a \$5,000 retainer and \$175 per hour for any work done.⁵⁸² Mayor Marc Mantini and other local officials “first met with Bercik on December 4, 2014,” shortly after the EDA made the borough the offer to pay off the debt for just \$116,000.⁵⁸³



An economic development project at the site of an abandoned glass company in Ford City, Pennsylvania collected millions of dollars in federal funds but now threatens to “force the borough into a catastrophic financial disaster.”

“To strike a deal under these circumstances for any amount of money was not deemed appropriate by council before all possible outcomes are known,” Ratliff said.⁵⁸⁴ “In fact, there is still an opportunity for this issue to go away with time.”⁵⁸⁵

A number of residents voiced their discontent at how the grant has been handled the special council meeting.

“While we can’t pay the EDA, we can pay all the lawyers,” pointed out Carol Fenyes.⁵⁸⁶ JoAnn Scopel added “everybody thinks we’re the laughingstock of the area to refuse the government payment.”⁵⁸⁷ Tonya Gladysiewski suggested the council “plead negligence” and ask for the \$116,000 payment option again. “It is embarrassing our town is going through all this,” Gladysiewski said.⁵⁸⁸

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In addition to the \$581,000 provided by the EDA to rebuild a former foundry building at the Heritage and Technology Park, the project received millions of dollars from other federal agencies.⁵⁸⁹ The Department of Housing and Urban Development's Economic Development Initiative gave \$1.5 million to redevelop three buildings and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers "donated approximately \$1 million in services to restore the flood prevention wall, install a new parking area, and create a 500-foot walking trail."⁵⁹⁰ The Department of Energy "provided technical expertise to ensure that the HAT's buildings would be energy efficient."⁵⁹¹ The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Pilot was awarded to the city to enable "more detailed assessments" of the property.⁵⁹²

In May 2003, the EPA highlighted the effort in Ford City as "an example of how a community can rebound from a severe economic blow."⁵⁹³ In 2015, the politicians of Ford City are providing an example of how not to rebound from a failed government boondoggle.

With a population of less than 3,000 people, the resident of Ford City now owe about \$200 each to bail out this boondoggle the government once promised would bring jobs to the borough.

40 **NOT THE DROIDS
YOU'RE LOOKING FOR**
California
Department of Defense
\$13.6 MILLION

Imagine being trapped in a burning building too dangerous for rescue crews to reach you. When all hope seems lost, a giant robot cuts a hole in the wall, removes the debris blocking your exit, and then suddenly—for no reason—tumbles over and can't get back up.

Except for the last part, most of that scenario is science fiction despite the Pentagon's effort to encourage the development of emergency rescue robots by giving away millions of dollars in prizes as part of an international competition.

"The biggest and most well-funded international robotics competition in years was a failure," concluded the review of the *Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency's* Robotics Challenge (DRC) posted by *Popular Science*.⁵⁹⁴ "Unimpressive," "bumbling," "fizzled," "incompetent," "disappointment," and "a bust" were among the other terms it used to describe the contestants and the event, which cost taxpayers millions of dollars.⁵⁹⁵

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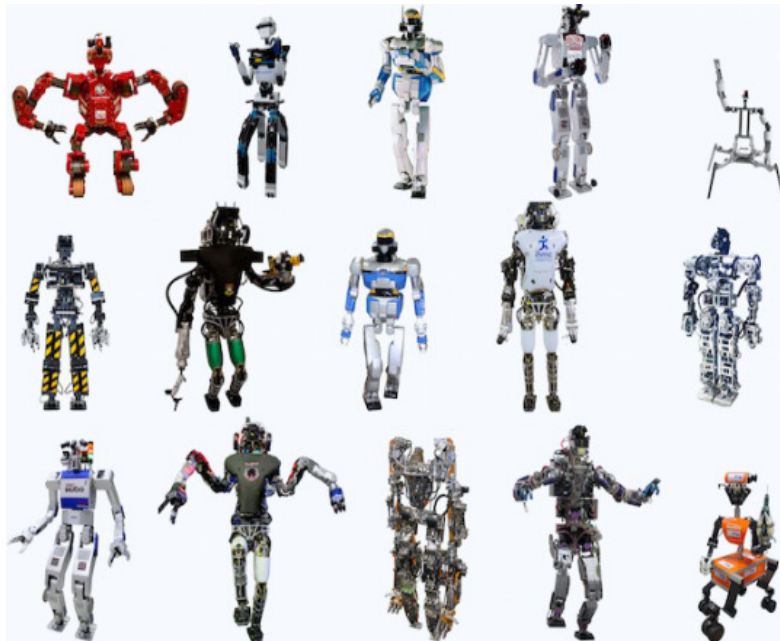
THE FARCE AWAKENS

Three years in the making, the DRC finals were held on June 5 and 6 in Pomona, California.⁵⁹⁶ DARPA spent nearly \$40 million on the contest, including \$13.6 million in 2015.⁵⁹⁷ The winning team received a \$2 million grand prize, second place took home \$1 million and third place collected \$500,000.⁵⁹⁸ Twenty-four robots competed in the DRC Finals.

Each of the robots was expected to complete eight tasks:

- Driving a vehicle through a course;
- Getting out of the vehicle;
- Pushing a door open and then moving through the doorway;
- Turning a round handle to open a valve;
- Cutting a hole in drywall using a cordless drill;
- A surprise task disclosed to the teams the day before their run;
- Navigating through a field of rubble; and
- Walking up stairs.⁵⁹⁹

Just three of the robots managed to complete the circuit.⁶⁰⁰



The contestants in the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency's 2015 Robotics Challenge.

The goal of the DRC was “to develop robots capable of assisting humans in responding to natural and man-made disasters.”⁶⁰¹ But instead, humans had to assist these robots get through a rather simple course that would have posed little challenge to most adult humans and even some children.

“This was a contest whose entries were so incompetent, at least compared to humans, that simply opening that door counted as a legitimate victory,” recounts *Popular Science*.⁶⁰²

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The robot that placed second in the competition fell head over heels while attempting to walk over rubble.

“One humanoid model collapsed in the opening seconds of the competition, and kept falling until its team pulled it off the course. Another humanoid tipped over while exiting the Polaris, and damaged itself so grievously that it literally bled, leaving behind a pool of oil for DARPA staffers and team members to scrub away. And those machines who conquered the door had to contend with such hazards as a floor with a two-to-three degree slope, and a path obstructed by precisely eight pieces of debris.”⁶⁰³

“When robots hit the ground at the DRC, which was constantly, they didn’t get up. They either lay there like corpses, or continued whatever movement they were engaged in before the seemingly inevitable loss of balance. As the falls kept coming, the state of humanoid robotics was exposed, in all its disappointing fragility.”⁶⁰⁴

“As a result, the biggest news out of the DRC seems to be a parade of GIFs of robots falling. One bot fell so hard, its head popped off,” noted *Popular Science*.⁶⁰⁵

“If the DRC hadn’t been so rife with slapstick, it would have put everyone to sleep. After all, the robot that racked up the most points, in the least amount of time, took nearly 45 minutes to complete a series of eight tasks that my kindergarten-age daughter could probably accomplish in 10 minutes,” wrote Erik Sofge, a science and technology science writer who has covered robotics for nearly a decade.⁶⁰⁶

The concept a competition to support the development of emergency rescue robots was inspired after the nuclear disaster at Fukushima, Japan, in 2011.⁶⁰⁷ While the objective was worthy, putting on a \$13.6 million contest to reach it proved to be a costly failure that does not appear to have contributed to the advancement of robotics.

DARPA program manager and DRC organizer Gill Pratt claimed the competition was a success, but for slightly different reasons. “These robots are big and made of lots of metal and you might assume people seeing them would be filled with fear and anxiety,” Pratt said.⁶⁰⁸ “But we heard groans of sympathy when those robots fell. And what did people do every time a robot scored a point? They cheered! It’s an extraordinary thing, and I think this is one of the

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biggest lessons from DRC—the potential for robots not only to perform technical tasks for us, but to help connect people to one another.”⁶⁰⁹

The teams that participated boasted “many of the world’s smartest and most accomplished roboticists.”⁶¹⁰ But “despite the best efforts of the world’s best roboticists, the robots were slow and clumsy. They kept falling over, and moved at the speed of molasses. In fact, no robots can quickly perform tasks we humans consider mundane,” observed a review of the competition published by the *Washington Post*.⁶¹¹



A robot attempting to walk falls flat on its face at DARPA’s Robotics Challenge Finals.

The top prize went to KAIST, a team from South Korea. The performance of the KAIST robot “was good enough to win the finals,” noted *Popular Science*, “but if you applied the robot’s timid, halting, 45-minute slog to a real-life disaster, it’s hard to imagine it accomplishing anything useful. And shouldn’t a machine that’s designed to charge into an emergency be both capable of moving with some measure of speed, and capable of surviving the sort of stumble that any human responder would easily recover from?”⁶¹²

How would any of these robots stand up—literally—in an actual emergency situation if they fall over just trying to open a door?

The *Popular Science* review body slammed the entire event: “The DRC was a high-stakes, and extremely well-funded robotics competition that turned out really silly. Its optics are those of feeble robots face-planting for no discernible reason, rather than heroic (or hellish) machines smashing through concrete walls.”⁶¹³ It further noted “the best DARPA could hope for was that someone paid enough attention to the DRC to ridicule it.”⁶¹⁴ As if to make that easy to do, DARPA posted a “highlights” reel of the robots in the competition taking a spill: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7A_QPGcjr0.⁶¹⁵

Clearly, these are not the droids you are looking for.

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SING ALONG BRUNCH PARTY

California
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$79,000

Resident of Redlands, California literally had something to sing about when the city received a \$79,000 Farmers Market Promotion Program grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).⁶¹⁶



Residents of Redlands, California literally had something to sing about when the city spent part of a USDA grant to host a sing-along brunch party that included music from the Wizard of Oz.

Some of the money from the grant paid to host a “Broadway and Brunch” party at the Mission Gables House where attendees were served a free “plate full of farm to table food and sang along to favorite show tunes.”⁶¹⁷

The sing-along brunch included music from the *Little Mermaid*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *Annie*.⁶¹⁸ Guests were also “treated to Broadway melodies from classic shows such as *Carousel* to modern hits like *In the Heights*.”⁶¹⁹

Dustin Ceithamer, who choreographed *Mary Poppins*, helped put the brunch performances together.⁶²⁰ “It is a party so we are going to be getting a little funky,” said Ceithamer.⁶²¹

“The event is made possible through community support through the USDA’s Farmers’ Market Promotion Program, said Heather Smith, project manager for the city of Redlands, in a Redlands Community Music Association news release about the brunch.”⁶²²

The brunch was held on June 14 and was limited to 80 people.⁶²³

The purpose of the grant was “to promote Redlands’ farmers’ markets through enhanced services, marketing campaigns and promotions, and vendor trainings.”⁶²⁴

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“The award of the USDA’s Farmers’ Market Promotion Program grant provided the city of Redlands with the opportunity to introduce locally grown produce to seniors and families through the Broadway and Brunch events,” Smith said. “Simply Fancy Cuisine purchased freshly grown produce from the downtown Saturday Farmers’ Market and Market Night to prepare brunch items, such as spinach and kale quiche, fruit salads, fresh juices, roasted vegetables and more. The goal of the grant is to enhance awareness of Redlands’ farmers’ markets and to make locally grown produce more accessible to customers.”⁶²⁵

While the show tunes brunch may have been a good time for the few who attended, it hit the wrong note with taxpayers.

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42

ULTIMATE TAILGATING

Nebraska
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$5 MILLION

University of Nebraska Husker fans tailgating before the football game against the University of Wisconsin Badgers in October scored an unexpected touchdown with the “Ultimate Tailgating Package,” compliments of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

“These packages are equipped with essential tools,” according to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln News. These essentials include “a koozie to keep your drinks cold, aprons to keep that sauce off your jeans, and a thermometer to be sure your beef is fully cooked- because no one wants to have to leave the tailgate because they ate undercooked beef.”⁶²⁶



University of Nebraska Husker fans scored the “Ultimate Tailgating Package,” compliments of USDA.

The tailgate packages also include a set of “Griller Profile Cards” that were “created to illustrate seven of the many different types of grillers out there. Each profile card describes a stereotypical griller and provides a short grocery list with witty, yet realistic items necessary for a tailgate.”⁶²⁷

One hundred Ultimate Tailgating Packages were handed out at the game by the Food Science Club.⁶²⁸

The kits, “designed to promote cookout safety,” are part of a project “funded through an Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Grant from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.”⁶²⁹

The project was part of a larger grant linking scientific research to outreach and education that is receiving \$5 million annually over four years.⁶³⁰

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The ultimate tailgate party before the game, however, was unlikely to prepare Husker fans for the Badgers' come-from-behind 23-21 victory from a 46-yard field goal scored with just four seconds remaining in the game.⁶³¹

43

RUSSIAN MAKER FAIRE FESTIVALS

Russia
U.S. Department of State
\$50,000

While Vladimir Putin was flexing Russian military might around the globe this year, most notably by launching airstrikes in Syria and occupying parts of Ukraine, the U.S. Embassy in Moscow busied itself planning a series of Maker Faire festivals in Russia.

Maker Faire is a “festival of invention” celebrating the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) arts and crafts movement.⁶³²

“The U.S. Embassy in Moscow (PAS Moscow) invites proposals for a grant to organize a Maker Faire (or series of Maker Faire events in various locations) in Russia to support a growing movement that promotes innovation and learning through ‘do-it-yourself’ hands-on access to cutting-edge technologies like 3D printers and Arduino robotics,” stated the request for grant proposals.⁶³³ The Maker Faire will also feature interactive art, mobile robots, wearable electronics, and “toyhacking and upcycling.”

The embassy plans to spend “up to \$50,000” to support the effort “to organize a Maker Faire (or series of Maker Faire events in various locations) in Russia before September 30, 2016,” according to the announcement.⁶³⁴ “The grantee is expected to organize a 2- 3 day Maker Faire event in Moscow and possibly another Russian city.” In addition to these festivals, the grantee will be responsible for “developing a sustainability plan to ensure the Maker Faire becomes an annual event” in Russia.⁶³⁵

A separate announcement on the website of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow states “MakeUS! is a pop-up roadshow introducing do-it-yourself (DIY) + maker concepts to Russian libraries + other institutions of learning. The initiative pairs Americans + Russians

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experimenting together through activities, presentations, + master classes on the maker movement, maker space design, digital storytelling, self-publishing, a/v remixing, animation, comic book making, 3D printing, + more. We are now seeking host sites for roadshow stops + community volunteers to serve as subject experts!”⁶³⁶

According to the State Department, the purpose of the grant program funding the Maker Faire in Russia is “to enable the Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries...; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations...and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world.”⁶³⁷

“The rise of the Maker Movement represents a huge opportunity for both the United States and Russia” contends the U.S. State Department.⁶³⁸ But Maker Faire festivals and roadshows are probably not the most effective counter to Russia’s ongoing crackdown on its own citizens’ freedom of speech and expression.

44

BLOCK PARTY

Missouri
Department of Transportation
\$86,000

You probably wouldn’t have expected residents of Kansas City to be dancing in the streets after a report revealed that one out of every four of the city’s major roads is in poor condition⁶³⁹ and another ranked Kansas City as the fourth worst city in the nation when it comes to pothole problems.⁶⁴⁰

But Kansas City threw a block party anyway, and paid for it with federal transportation money.⁶⁴¹

Inspired by a tradition that originated in Columbia called Ciclovía, a Spanish word meaning “cycleway,” the city hosted a street festival called “Cycle in the City.”⁶⁴² An \$86,000 federal transportation grant paid for “event management, advertising and planned activities,”⁶⁴³ which included dance classes, a climbing wall, yoga, a DJ, food stands, lawn games, biking, and skating.⁶⁴⁴

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An announcement for the event said it will “transform a portion of Ward Parkway from a motorized thoroughfare to a free, family-friendly open streets festival that encourages urban exploration through bicycling, walking, jogging, skating and playing.”⁶⁴⁵

“You close down a segment of a city street and invite people to come out and play in the street,” explained Deb Ridgway, who organized Cycle in the City.⁶⁴⁶

A group called Citizens for Responsible Government questioned why public money was being spent to throw a “block party” when the city “needs more money” for basic services.⁶⁴⁷



Potholes didn't stop Kansas City from throwing a street party with federal transportation funds.

“The city did confirm this was grant-funded,” noted the *Kansas City Star*, “though details about which grant and how much money was spent were not provided.”⁶⁴⁸

A one-mile stretch of Ward Parkway was closed for five hours on a Saturday in May,⁶⁴⁹ which didn't put many residents—already fed up because so many other similar events are held in their neighborhood— in a very

festive mood.⁶⁵⁰ “They already have to host too many festivals and races” that “disrupt their weekend plans with road closures, blocked driveways, noisy crowds, trash and damaged landscaping.”⁶⁵¹ There were at least four such events in this area last year including Strutt with Your Mutt and Rock the Parkway.⁶⁵²

“They're tired of all the races and runs that they feel are spoiling one of the most beautiful parts of town — stately homes, stunning landscaping, public fountains and sculptures,” reported the *Kansas City Star*. “The road closures, blocked driveways and big crowds are not part of the lifestyle they've invested in, and now this new event drops right in the middle of wedding and graduation season.”⁶⁵³

“We need a break,” said Armour Fields Homes Association board member Jane Parks Aylward, noting the vicinity of Ward Parkway already deals with at least four runs a year.⁶⁵⁴

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“They need to limit the events, and there are other parts of the city they can go,” exclaimed John Murphy, another board member.⁶⁵⁵

“It seems like somebody was able to get a grant and use it for purposes other than what the grant was for,” said Jerry Hughes, who owns a home in the area. “It’s a waste of taxpayer’s money and it’s a terrible inconvenience. I don’t see any redeeming qualities.”⁶⁵⁶

45

REINDEER HERDING

Alaska
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$55,000

You don’t have to believe in Santa Clause to know Alaska is a great place to herd reindeer.

Although not native to the state, reindeer herding has become a “cultural and traditional mainstay” in many of its villages.⁶⁵⁷

While there are now 20,000 reindeer in western Alaska and 10,000 more elsewhere in the state,⁶⁵⁸ the first reindeer were brought to Alaska from Siberia in the 1890s to help alleviate food shortages among the Native Alaskans.⁶⁵⁹ Congress approved the project but provided no federal funds for the initial effort.

This year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) awarded \$55,000 to the University of Alaska Center for Economic Development to “study the feasibility of large-scale, commercial reindeer herding.”⁶⁶⁰

The USDA initiative seems to duplicate the mission of the Reindeer Herders Association, which is part of the Kawerak, Inc. Natural Resources Division and “provides assistance in the development of a viable reindeer industry to enhance the economic base for rural Alaska and to improve the management of the herds.”⁶⁶¹

And a market for reindeer already exists. “There is high global demand for the meat,” says Dr. Greg Finstad, who runs the Reindeer Research Program at the University of Alaska.

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“Demand isn’t the problem.”⁶⁶² Brandi Harmon, whose family runs American Pride Foods that sells reindeer meat in Anchorage echoes that, noting “Christmas is our busiest time of year. Orders increase 80 percent around the holiday because people buy it for the novelty. But the interesting thing is that sales level off but don’t go all the way down. Once people try it, they get hooked. Our year over year growth is phenomenal.”⁶⁶³

So what might a USDA sponsored feasibility study find that could be hindering more commercial reindeer herding in the state?

Ironically, a 2007 study on the economic outlook of reindeer markets by the University of Alaska, Anchorage, Institute for Social and Economic Research examined why reindeer “producers seem to be struggling when they are in such a high-demand market” and pointed to USDA, in part, as a barrier to profitability.⁶⁶⁴ “The regulations and classifications around reindeer as a certified product have proven very difficult to several industry players. In Alaska, the necessity for state or national certification for sale in the state or to the rest of the nation has been the barrier to entry for many potential market players,” according to the analysis. “The expense of building a USDA coded slaughtering facility in such remote locations is very high and limits market entry. Secondly, the USDA and Canadian equivalent CFIA classify reindeer as non-amenable and game meat, respectively, making it more expensive and difficult to process.”⁶⁶⁵

Reindeer herding got started in Alaska without the federal government’s involvement and has continued despite it.

Uncle Sam needs to stop playing reindeer games with taxpayers’ money.



Uncle Sam is playing reindeer games with taxpayers’ money, paying to study the feasibility of reindeer herding in Alaska.

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46

ROBOT LOBBY GREETER

Florida
Department of Defense Office of Naval Research
\$2.5 MILLION

A robot served as a lobby greeter at the University of Central Florida (UCF) this year as part of an Office of Naval Research (ONR) experiment examining how humans interact with robots.

With a plastic mask, wig and long metal fingers, the greeter has a creepy appearance resembling a hybrid of horror movie villains Michael Myers from “Halloween” and Freddy Krueger from “A Nightmare on Elm Street.” Probably not the smiling face you would hope to be greeted by.

Nonetheless, the greeter welcomed and interacted with people who were passing through the lobby of the university’s Institute for Simulation and Training for several weeks. It was “controlled by a human operator in another location.”⁶⁶⁶

This Department of Defense (DOD) grant to UCF “supports ONR’s Human Surrogate Interaction program, a three-year investigation into how humans interact with virtual (avatars), physical (animatronics), and other types of surrogates,” according to a DOD Information Paper. “The grant, Exploration of Human Surrogates for Live-Virtual Training, is a three year effort that began in March 2014. Total funding planned for the grant is \$2,312,188. Defense University Research Instrumentation Program (DURIP) grant provided \$178,437 in additional funding to purchase equipment that was combined with previous equipment purchased through 2012 ONR DURIP.”⁶⁶⁷



This robot served as a lobby greeter as part of an Office of Naval Research project to analyze how humans interact with robots.

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The “lobby greeter” study lasted for several weeks and researchers are now exploring “the use of surrogates in more complex situations that require a greater amount of interaction.”⁶⁶⁸



A visitor waves to the Office of Naval Research's lobby greeter.

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47

BOGUS PAYMENTS

Nationwide
Government wide
MORE THAN \$100 BILLION

Bogus business tax benefits for corporations. Free lunches for the well-off. Student aid for prisoners and crime rings. Paying the same energy bills... twice. And billions of dollars in handouts for the dead.

These are just a small sampling of the nearly \$1 trillion worth of erroneous payments the federal government has made over the past decade.⁶⁶⁹ The total annual cost of improper payments has been near or above \$100 billion every year since 2009,⁶⁷⁰ reaching a record high of \$125 billion in 2014.⁶⁷¹

“Improper payments” occur when “funds go to the wrong recipient; the right recipient receives the incorrect amount of funds (including overpayments and underpayments); documentation is not available to support a payment; or the recipient uses funds in an improper manner.”⁶⁷²

From tax credits to federal health programs to school lunch programs, Supplemental Nutrition Services (SNAP), and Unemployment Insurance, tens of billions of dollars are being misspent annually as a result of mismanagement and fraud. These improper payments take from the taxpayers as well as those for whom the funds were intended to help.

The IRS is paying out billions of dollars in bogus tax benefits to corporations, identity thieves, prisoners and others not eligible for the benefits including children under the age of 14 who probably are not even old enough to file tax returns. The IRS erroneously paid corporations more than \$2.7 billion in tax credits that had expired or for which the businesses did not even qualify, the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) revealed in February.⁶⁷³ A month earlier, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report that found the IRS paid out more than \$5.8 billion in fraudulent refunds to identity thieves.⁶⁷⁴ More than a million Americans not enrolled in a school received education tax credits as did hundreds of prisoners, children under the age of 14 who are typically too young to be attending a postsecondary educational institution, and others not eligible for the assistance, costing \$3.2 billion, according to a TIGTA report issued in March.⁶⁷⁵ In all, TIGTA identified 3.8 million tax

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filers who received more than \$5.6 billion in potentially erroneous education credits. “The IRS has yet to establish effective processes to identify taxpayers who claim potentially erroneous education credits for students who are of an unlikely age to pursue postsecondary education or who are incarcerated,” according to TIGTA.⁶⁷⁶ The Earned Income Tax Credit boasts the highest improper payment rate of any federal program. With a 27.2 percent error rate, the IRS paid out more than \$17 billion in tax credits to those who did not qualify for the benefit intended to aid low and moderate income workers.⁶⁷⁷

In March, “a massive scheme” was exposed in New York in which thousands of homeless people were “lured” and “recruited” from shelters and welfare offices and taken to medical clinics “for unnecessary tests with the promise of free footwear such as sneakers, shoes and boots.”⁶⁷⁸ Brooklyn District Attorney Ken Thompson said the “poor people” were referred to as “guinea pigs” and “were exploited for hours, if not days.”⁶⁷⁹ In all, the “sneaker scheme” swindled about \$7 million from Medicaid in New York, which is a joint federal/state program.⁶⁸⁰ While this is an outrageous amount of money, it represents just a small fraction of the cost of the mismanagement and fraud within the state’s healthcare program for the poor. Nearly \$1 billion, including \$513 million in improper payments and missed revenue and \$361 million in questionable transactions, has been identified by the New York Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) outlined in audit reports issued between January 2011 and February 2015.⁶⁸¹ Medicaid overpaid pharmacies nearly \$1.2 million for controlled substances that “exceeded supply limits,” according to an OSC audit released in February, for example.⁶⁸²

More than \$6 million “in questionable payments meant to help poor families pay their energy bills” was approved by Baltimore, Maryland, “including grants to three dozen households that aren’t even in the city.”⁶⁸³ The city “signed off on paying the same energy bill twice” in “nearly three dozen cases.”⁶⁸⁴ The low-income home energy assistance program is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and administered by the Baltimore Department of Housing and Community Development.

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) ate up nearly \$12.5 million paying for free lunches and reduced-priced meals for children from households with “excessive” income, according to a report issued in April by the USDA Office of Inspector General (OIG).⁶⁸⁵ The audit noted “numerous cases of alleged fraud and theft by deception involving school district employees.” In one case, a New Jersey school board president whose husband worked for the *New York Times* and was the owner and head coach of a semi-professional football team under-reported her household income so her children could receive free or subsidized lunches provided by the National School Lunch Program.⁶⁸⁶ A school food authority (SFA) in Florida spent \$207,763 intended for school lunches on 11 vehicles, including 4 sport utility vehicles (SUVs).⁶⁸⁷

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A Michigan woman who was the world's oldest person passed away this June, about a month after her 116th birthday.⁶⁸⁸ Yet, according to the Social Security Administration's record-keeping, there are 6.5 million people over the age of 111 in the U.S. who are not recorded as deceased.⁶⁸⁹ Just 42 people in the whole world are known to still be that old.⁶⁹⁰ As far as the government is concerned they are all still alive—and eligible for government handouts. In fact, the federal government is paying billions of dollars in benefits to millions of Americans who have passed away.⁶⁹¹ The actual recipients of the money are criminals and family members of the deceased.

The Department of Education actually cheated on its improper payment math test, giving itself a curved grade to mask the true scope of the problem. A review by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) found the Department's reported improper payment estimates and estimation methodologies for the Pell and Direct Loan programs are "inaccurate, incomplete and unreliable."⁶⁹² The audit concluded that the rate derived from using Office of Management and Budget "approved methodologies were significantly higher than those calculated using the Department's revised methodologies."⁶⁹³ The result: More than \$1.5 billion worth of improper payments not counted on the Department of Education's annual report card.⁶⁹⁴ In a single year, the OIG estimates "more than 34,000 participants in crime rings improperly received federal student aid."⁶⁹⁵ Federal student financial assistance is an attractive target for criminals because it does not require a credit check and has "few restrictions on how the money can be spent."⁶⁹⁶

Improved management and data collection to verify income, eligibility, college enrollment, age, or even if a recipient is alive or dead could save taxpayers \$100 billion or more every year⁶⁹⁷ and would help provide greater resources to assist those truly in need.

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48 **FAT DETECTOR**

West Virginia
National Science Foundation
\$200,000

“Does this make me look fat?”

Uncle Sam wants to answer the question every man fears.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is spending more than \$200,000 to develop a “portable, reliable, and convenient” tool to determine someone’s body mass index (BMI) by simply looking at a person’s face and body.⁶⁹⁸

BMI estimates body fat by analyzing the relationship between someone’s height and weight and dividing the results into four categories: Underweight, normal weight, overweight, and obese.⁶⁹⁹ “It is important to remember that although BMI correlates with the amount of body fat, BMI does not directly measure body fat,” cautions the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).⁷⁰⁰

“A major reason of the prevalence of obesity is that many people are not aware of their BMI and the higher risks of various diseases associated with high BMI values,” the researchers claim.⁷⁰¹ Their goal is “development of an intelligent and computational system that can be used by everybody at anywhere and anytime” to determine if someone may be overweight or obese based upon their physical appearance.⁷⁰²

“This project explores the inherent and fundamental relation between BMI and the visual appearance of human face and body,” according to the grant summary.⁷⁰³

“The key research question is what kinds of features or patterns can be extracted from human face and body images to characterize the visual appearance related to BMI measure. In facial images, the study focuses on 2D facial feature representation and its robustness in order to build the mapping relation from face to BMI. In body images, the focuses are on 3D body shape analysis to connect to BMI measure. This research provides a theoretic foundation for developing a visual analysis system that can be deployed to provide convenient estimate of the BMI and related health conditions anywhere and anytime.”⁷⁰⁴

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The project's principal investigator, Guodong Guo, "previously created a system that predicted BMIs from mug shots" by assessing "seven weight-related components in a face image, including the ratios of cheekbone width to jaw width, face length to cheekbone width and the average distance between eyebrow and eye."⁷⁰⁵



The federal government dares to answer the question every man fears.

"This could be used in smart health applications, relating face images to BMI and associated health risks," says Guo. "Or on online dating sites, for instance, it could help you assess the BMI and state of health of people you might date."⁷⁰⁶

With BMI already relatively simple to calculate, taxpayers can conclude it's the federal government that is long overdue for a diet.

This project begs the question, "does this spending make the federal budget look fat?"

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49

DECISION IMPAIRED CAMPAIGN

Tennessee
Department of Transportation
\$77,000

“Buy a drink for a marginally good-looking girl, only to find out she’s chatty, clingy and your boss’s daughter,” stated a drink coaster.⁷⁰⁷

“After a few drinks the girls look hotter and the music sounds better. Just remember: If your judgement is impaired, so is your driving,” read a bathroom flier.⁷⁰⁸

Calling women clingy and better looking after a few drinks, these are just some of the messages left on drink coasters and posters on bathroom walls at bars distributed as part of a federally funded “Legends of the Stall” campaign in Tennessee.

The sexist sounding slogans were echoed by others posted on a website and broadcast in radio advertisements with the stated intent of discouraging drinking and driving.⁷⁰⁹



Does this look like a message to discourage drinking and driving?

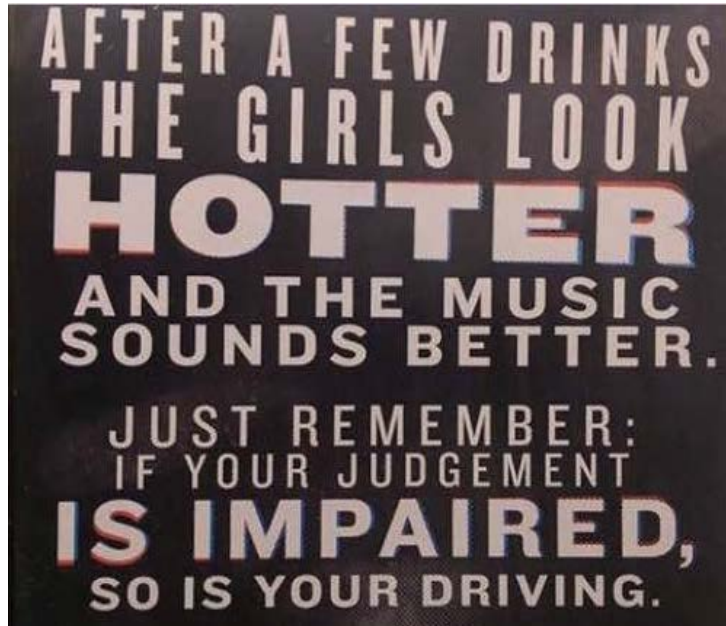
In a radio ad, for example, a drunk man tells a woman she would “be cuter with the lights off.”⁷¹⁰

The layout of the website, impaired.tntrafficsafety.org, resembled the wall of a men’s room covered with graffiti.⁷¹¹ It featured a series of drinking stories starring an inebriated man “clumsily hitting on women and commenting on their looks.”⁷¹² In one, the drunk crudely states “plastic surgery would do wonders for your jaw structure and

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definitely your nose.”⁷¹³ In another, “an inebriated young man proclaims that although he bet everyone at the bar \$100 he was the best dancer, he didn’t drive home drunk or sleep with a ‘creepy older woman’ who got ‘lucky’ that night. Or wait maybe he did. The story leaves this to the imagination of the reader.”⁷¹⁴ In an animated skit entitled “I’m so sorry Mr. Mittens,” a drunk wipes up his vomit with a kitten, quipping the cat did not care for being treated as a mop and became “hiss-terical.”⁷¹⁵



A federally funded campaign to prevent impaired driving was canceled immediately after being criticized for promoting sexism, making light of binge drinking and wasting tax dollars.

Intended to grab the attention of young males, the campaign instead caught the attention—and ire—of taxpayers for making light of binge drinking, insulting women, and wasting public funds.⁷¹⁶

Tiffany Cannon, a Nashville bartender, says the “coasters designed to prevent drunk driving do anything but.”⁷¹⁷ Instead, she says “the message here is the only way to pick up a man if you’re an average-looking woman is if the man is drunk.”⁷¹⁸ And as insensitive as the sexist remarks are, she says “the most offensive words” on the coasters were “Paid for by the TN Governor’s Highway Safety Office.”⁷¹⁹

The total amount spent on the “Legends of the Stall” effort has not been disclosed, however the “distributed materials cost \$77,096 and were created by The Tombras Group of Knoxville, under contract” with the Governor’s Highway Safety Office.⁷²⁰

“Tennessee taxpayers didn’t foot the bill,” noted the state officials, pointing out “the campaign was paid for with a grant, through the federal government’s ‘Booze It and Lose It’ program.”⁷²¹ Of course, the federal funds being spent are collected from taxpayers in every state, including Tennessee.

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This decision-impaired spending is typical of bureaucrats with too much of other people's money and not enough accountability.

The campaign was quickly pulled over and the Governor's Highway Safety Office was charged with impaired decision making.

The Governor's Highway Safety Office "continually experiments with new strategies in order to be effective with various target demographics, and we will be closely monitoring the results," explained a spokesman in response to the criticism.⁷²² A day later, the campaign was cancelled⁷²³ the website was taken down, and an apology was issued.⁷²⁴

50

ROTTING YEMEN AID

Virginia/Yemen
Department of Defense/Department of State
MORE THAN \$700,000

On the frontlines of the war on terrorism and torn by civil war, Yemen is in crisis, but military and medical supplies intended to aid the country sit rotting away in a warehouse in Virginia and incurring storage fees. The equipment has been shipped twice, not to Yemen, but from one storage facility to another and then to yet another in Virginia.⁷²⁵

The support is desperately needed both to stabilize the region and to protect our own country. Yemen serves as the base for the terrorist group Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) which continues to plot against U.S. citizens and has attempted several attacks on the U.S. homeland.⁷²⁶ The "underwear" bomber who attempted to blow up an airplane over Detroit on Christmas Day 2009 with a device hidden in his underpants is linked to the group.⁷²⁷ A coup has driven the country's president, a U.S. ally, from the nation's capital, threatening counterterrorism and intelligence efforts in the region.

The Departments of Defense and State have allocated over \$500 million to support security efforts in Yemen over the past decade,⁷²⁸ including \$48 million from Foreign Military Financing (FMF).⁷²⁹

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Military and medical supplies intended to aid Yemen fight Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula sit rotting away in a warehouse in Virginia and incurring storage fees.

Despite the urgency of the situation in the country, U.S. assistance has faced delays reaching Yemen. A review by GAO found delays affected 10 of 11 U.S. security assistance projects for Yemen.⁷³⁰

The Yemeni government has stubbornly refused to have 200 parcels of equipment purchased in 2007 with FMF grants shipped from a warehouse in Virginia.⁷³¹ As a result, the medical supplies have expired, the batteries have corroded, the explosives pose a fire hazard, and the amount owed from

storage fees have accumulated.

The items include:

- Over 150 night vision goggles that cost nearly \$600,000 that now require new export authorization permission to be shipped;
- Explosives requiring special storage due to fire hazards;
- Batteries that are hazardous and require inspection;
- Hazardous liquid solvents that could require special disposal; and
- Medical supplies including first aid kits, syringes and needles.⁷³²

Some of the medical supplies have expired and the batteries are not usable because they have corroded and “likely require special disposal methods.”⁷³³

The Pentagon does not have an estimate on the total value of the unused equipment.⁷³⁴

The contract between the government of Yemen and Panalpina, its freight forwarder, ended in 2008. The equipment was then transferred to a Virginia warehouse of another freight forwarder, DHL Global Forwarding. Yemen paid \$117,000 in fees for arrears, storage, and shipment fees in 2010, and the equipment continued to accumulate at the freight forwarder’s warehouse.⁷³⁵ Even though Yemen’s contract with this company expired in 2011, the freight forwarder continued to receive U.S.-funded equipment intended for Yemen.⁷³⁶

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State Department officials only became aware the equipment had not shipped when the GAO started to investigate the situation this year.⁷³⁷

The Pentagon, however, has been aware of the problem since 2008. While DOD officials “felt it was not practical to expend resources to resolve” the dispute, the Department did has worked out a deal with the forwarding company to release the equipment for just \$8,000 if Yemen made the payment by May 1, 2015. DOD offered to reimburse the Yemeni government for the cost, but the fee was still not paid by the deadline.⁷³⁸

In July, the freight forwarder moved the equipment to another warehouse in July 2015.⁷³⁹

Yemen still owes \$8,000 to DHL. The equipment is now being held by VMW Express in Sterling, Virginia. “We do not know how much the [Government of Yemen] owes the new facility,” according to a DOD official.⁷⁴⁰

U.S. taxpayers are probably going to get stuck with the bill to move and dispose of the unused supplies.⁷⁴¹ “According to DOD officials, Yemen is likely to use U.S. FMF funds if, as expected, DOD is involved in the final disposition.”⁷⁴²

As of 2012, new equipment for Yemen is being shipped by the U.S. military. The costs are being paid for by Yemen with funds provided by the United States.

51

ETHANOL PUMPS

Nation wide
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$100 MILLION

Ethanol is bad for the environment and automobiles, increases the cost of food, and is less fuel efficient, yet the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) keeps finding new ways to fill up the tank of the ethanol industry with corporate welfare.

Ethanol is a biofuel derived mostly from corn in the U.S. and primarily used as a gasoline blending component. Most gasoline powered automobiles can use up to 10 volume percent ethanol (E10). Higher blends of ethanol are “available on a limited basis,” but “can only be used in certain vehicles and require special pumps.”⁷⁴³

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USDA has repeatedly thwarted the intent of Congress to cut off subsidies for the ethanol industry. After Congress rejected the extension of the ethanol tax credit in 2010, USDA began siphoning funds from the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) to finance the expansion of higher ethanol blender pumps. Congress then prohibited REAP funds from supporting the ethanol pumps in the 2014 farm bill.⁷⁴⁴ USDA responded by using the Biofuel Infrastructure Partnership (BIP) program to spend funds from the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) to continue financing ethanol blender pumps.⁷⁴⁵

CCC is “a government-owned corporation of the USDA that operates a revolving fund, which draws on its permanent borrowing authority from the Federal Reserve and the U.S. Treasury to finance a range of U.S. agricultural programs. As such, BIP is not reliant on annual appropriations measures for funding.”⁷⁴⁶

USDA justifies its actions by pointing to Section 5 of the CCC Charter Act, which authorizes actions to “increase the domestic consumption of agricultural commodities (other than tobacco) by expanding or aiding in the expansion of domestic markets or by developing or aiding in the development of new and additional markets, marketing facilities, and uses for such commodities.”⁷⁴⁷



USDA keeps finding new ways to fill up the tank of the ethanol industry with corporate welfare.

The program dispensed \$100 million to 21 states this year to finance the installation of higher-level ethanol fuel blend pumps.⁷⁴⁸ USDA estimates with a dollar-for-dollar match from state and private sources, BIP grants provide for nearly 5,000 ethanol pumps at over 1,400 fueling stations across the country.⁷⁴⁹ USDA also provided direct subsidies to ethanol production. The department awarded a \$500,000 grant, for example, to Mid America Agri Products/Wheatland in Nebraska for ethanol production.⁷⁵⁰

While “the ethanol production industry is in the midst of a long ‘winning streak’ in terms of profits,”⁷⁵¹ corporate corn welfare comes at a high cost for taxpayers, consumers, and the environment.

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Harms the Environment: Planting more corn to meet the demand for ethanol has “wiped out millions of acres of conservation land, destroyed habitat and polluted water supplies,” according to an investigation by the Associated Press. “Five million acres of land set aside for conservation — more than Yellowstone, Everglades and Yosemite National Parks combined — have vanished” over the past decade. Wetlands are being filled in and billions of pounds of fertilizer “seeped” into drinking water and “contaminated rivers.”⁷⁵²

Less Fuel Efficient: “The energy content of ethanol is about 33 percent less than pure gasoline,” according to the U.S. Department of Energy.⁷⁵³ “Therefore, vehicle fuel economy may decrease by up to 3.3 percent when using E10.”⁷⁵⁴

Damages Automobiles: Few “cars on the road are approved by automakers” for the use of fuels containing blends of ethanol higher than E10.⁷⁵⁵ “Sustained use of E15 in both newer and older vehicles could result in significant problems such as accelerated engine wear and failure, fuel-system damage and false check engine lights,” according to AAA research.⁷⁵⁶ Any damage caused by ethanol may not be covered by manufacturers warranties.⁷⁵⁷

Increases Food Prices: “The increasing demand for corn for ethanol production has contributed to higher corn prices” which has resulted in higher costs for producers of meat and poultry, according to an analysis by the Government Accountability Office (GAO).⁷⁵⁸

Costs Taxpayers: The corn ethanol industry has collected tens of billions of dollars in federal handouts over the years, including federal tax credits, loan guarantees, and grants. The industry also benefits from the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) mandating increasing amounts of biofuels, including ethanol, be blended into the U.S. fuel supply.⁷⁵⁹

**52 OBAMACARE
COVERAGE**
Nation wide
Department of Health and Human Services
\$400 MILLION

Banking fees, postage, and printing costs incurred by the Washington state Health Benefit Exchange (WHBE) may have been paid for by Obamacare this year even though those federal funds are no longer permitted to be spent to cover operating expenses.⁷⁶⁰

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State-based marketplaces (SBMs), set up as part of Obamacare to offer health insurance purchasing options, were supposed to be “self-sustaining” by this year and are prohibited by law from spending federal funds for operational costs as of January 2015.

But due to a lack of non-federal revenues and federal guidance, “there is a risk that SBMs might inappropriately use establishment grant funds for operational costs,” warned an “Early Alert” issued by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) in April.⁷⁶¹ “For example, according to its budget documents WHBE might use \$10 million in establishment grant funds to support operations from July 1 to December 31, 2015. Budgeted operating costs include \$2 million for printing and postage and \$2 million for bank fees.”⁷⁶²

Despite the ban on federal funds being spent on the SBMs’ operational costs, CMS provided approximately \$420 million to the exchanges in December 2014 to pay “for the design, development, and implementation of SBMs and State partnership marketplaces.”⁷⁶³

“‘Operating expense’ and ‘design, development, and implementation expenses’ have little meaningful distinction,” determined the HHS OIG.⁷⁶⁴ As a result, SBMs “might have used, and might continue to use, establishment grant funds for operating expenses after January 1, 2015, contrary to law.”⁷⁶⁵

While funds may have been misspent on bank fees and support operations including design and development for the exchange, nearly 50,000 Washington residents were notified they would be losing their coverage because insurer Moda Health had decided to pull out of the state’s exchange.⁷⁶⁶ The decision, blamed on “lower-than-expected risk corridors reimbursement from the federal government,” left 47,000, or 29 percent of all enrollees, scrambling to find new coverage for 2016.⁷⁶⁷

“This will be disruptive for consumers who are enrolled in Moda plans,” conceded Pam MacEwan, CEO of the Washington Health Benefit Exchange, noting these patients “will have to choose a new carrier and plan before January 2016.”⁷⁶⁸

An HHS spokeswoman said “should CMS find any misspent funds,” the department “will use remedies available under the law and regulations to recover any such funds.”⁷⁶⁹ Unfortunately, CMS does not have any available remedies to recover the coverage offered by Moda Health that is no longer available for Washington residents.

While nearly half-a-billion taxpayer dollars were sunk into “design, development, and implementation expenses” since December, Obamacare premium prices spiked. The cost of

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health insurance offered by Obamacare exchanges for 2016 increased by 15 percent for the average of gold rated plans.⁷⁷⁰

In total, more than \$4.8 billion has been provided by HHS to states and the District of Columbia (DC) for planning, establishment, and early innovator grants to get SBMs up and running.⁷⁷¹

Even with billions of dollars of subsidies, nearly half of the 17 SBMs “are struggling financially.”⁷⁷² Many “are wrestling with surging costs, especially for balky technology and expensive customer call centers — and tepid enrollment numbers,” reports *The Washington Post*. Some states “are weighing turning over part or all of their troubled marketplaces to the federal exchange, HealthCare.gov,” a process that costs about \$10 million or more.⁷⁷³

Call centers that answer questions and sign people up are one of the biggest operational costs for the SBMs. “Enrollment can be a lengthy process — and in several states, contractors are paid by the minute.”⁷⁷⁴ And the cost of those minutes adds up when it takes hours to resolve relatively simple problems. One frustrated Vermont resident said he “spent hours on the phone with Vermont Health Connect representatives over the past year, trying to resolve problems. Most recently, when his daughter got a job with benefits in March, he called the marketplace to get her taken off his plan. Six weeks passed before he got a call back from an exchange employee, who had to spend more than two hours helping him redo his entire application for what should have been a simple fix.”⁷⁷⁵

IT work “to correct defective software that might, for example, make mistakes in calculating subsidies” is another big cost.⁷⁷⁶ “A lot of people are going to want to know: What happened to all those taxpayer dollars that went to these IT vendors?” points out Sabrina Corlette, project director of Georgetown University’s Center for Health Insurance Reforms.⁷⁷⁷

The billions poured into setting up the exchanges have not made them run efficiently and many of the state Obamacare exchanges continue to be plagued with problems.

“Despite an eventual cost of up to \$200 million in federal funds,” Vermont’s exchange “is still not fully functional, while disgust with the system is running deep among residents and lawmakers alike,” according to *The New York Times*.⁷⁷⁸ “I talk to my colleagues elsewhere and, good God, this just wasn’t set up for success,” laments Lawrence Miller, Vermont’s chief of health care reform.⁷⁷⁹

Other states that set up SBMs are reaching the same conclusion.

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Following Nevada, New Mexico, and Oregon, Hawaii abandoned its state exchange this summer after the state had already burned through \$130 million of federal money setting it up.⁷⁸⁰ Hawaii is now spending another \$30 million to transition to the federal exchange and the 40,000 who enrolled will have to sign up again on HealthCare.gov.⁷⁸¹ Some state officials worry that when the federal government takes over, more people will become uninsured.⁷⁸²

“Rhode Island and Washington State, face uncertainties in operating revenue,” according to the HHS OIG’s review.⁷⁸³

Massachusetts, which served as the model for Obamacare, has been “forced to rebuild its exchange last year after it failed to function, and has spent more than \$250 million, mostly in federal funds, on it so far.”⁷⁸⁴ This year, the U.S. Department of Justice began an unspecified investigation into the exchange and subpoenaed records.⁷⁸⁵ *The Boston Herald*, however, reports “the policy director of a local think tank who has spoken with ‘whistleblowers’ says the feds are probing the state Health Connector to see if the Patrick administration misled them about the state’s troubled Obamacare website in order to keep taxpayer funds flowing to Massachusetts.”⁷⁸⁶

“It was a significant investment” for those states that set up their own exchanges, says Cynthia Cox, associate director of health reform and private insurance at the Kaiser Family Foundation. “For some states it’s sort of like a sunk cost. They’ve made this investment, but it may not make sense to continue to put more money into the system if it’s not going to work as well as it could.”⁷⁸⁷

Billions of dollars intended for health care have instead been spent on bureaucrats, call centers, contractors, and even banking fees for government health care exchanges that are flat lining rather than on medical exams, treatments and doctors visits for patients.

53 PINATA APPRECIATION
Maryland
National Endowment for the Arts
\$20,000

After a young African-American died from injuries he suffered while in police custody, Baltimore, Maryland bust open this summer with looting, rioting, violence and finger pointing.

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Some claimed a “massive investments in urban communities” by the federal government was necessary to fix the long simmering problems.⁷⁸⁸ Others countered that a massive \$1.8 billion “investment” had just been made by the President’s stimulus law,⁷⁸⁹ arguing the situation was far more complex than simply spending public money.

The first financial assistance to reach the city following the April 12 arrest that incited the upheaval may have been a federal grant “to support an apprenticeship program and a series of public events celebrating the piñata.”⁷⁹⁰ The funds were specifically provided to “train apprentices and the public in piñata construction and its use.”⁷⁹¹

These skills are unlikely to spur the type of economic and social revival so desperately needed in a city where nearly one in four residents live below the poverty line and good jobs are out of reach for many. “For young black men between the ages of 20 and 24, the unemployment rate was an astounding 37 percent in 2013, according to the most recent data available from the U.S. Census Bureau. That's compared with 10 percent for white men of the same age.”⁷⁹²

The \$20,000 grant was awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts to the Fell’s Point Creative Alliance. The group notes on its website that “the piñata once symbolized the devil.”⁷⁹³ In this case, it symbolizes the type of wasteful Washington spending fed up taxpayers want to swing a bat at and bustopen.



The first federal aid to Baltimore following the arrest that incited this summer’s riots was “to support an apprenticeship program and a series of public events celebrating the piñata.”^{794 795}

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54

UNNECESSARY DATA CENTERS

Nation wide
Government wide
\$5 BILLION

The federal government has more data centers then it can count and, despite the high cost to maintain the centers, much of the storage space available on the networks is not being utilized.

A data center is a group of networked computer servers typically used for remote storage, processing, or distribution of large amounts of data.

Agencies have been directed to identify, consolidate and close unnecessary data centers. Instead, the number keeps growing. It was estimated the government had 3,133 data centers in 2010 when the Federal Data Center Consolidation Initiative was launched to close or optimize 40 percent of the government's unnecessary data centers.

This year, federal agencies tallied 11,700 data centers, 2,000 more than counted by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) a year ago.⁷⁹⁶

"Operating such a large number of centers has been and continues to be a significant cost to the federal government, including costs for hardware, software, real estate, and cooling," GAO notes. "In 2007, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimated that the electricity cost to operate federal servers and data centers across the government was about \$450 million annually. According to the Department of Energy (Energy), data center spaces can consume 100 to 200 times more electricity than a standard office space."⁷⁹⁷

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) reported in 2009 "that server utilization rates as low as 5 percent" across the federal government's servers.⁷⁹⁸

David Powner, GAO's director of IT management issues, estimates more than \$5 billion could be saved by closing another 2,000 data centers that are not needed.⁷⁹⁹

"Most of the 11,700 data centers used across government are what Powner called 'non-core' centers," that could be closed or migrated to cloud computing.⁸⁰⁰ Wasting billions of dollars on unnecessary and underutilized data centers does not compute.

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55 **SWANKY SCIENCE SOIREE**

Washington D.C.
National Science Foundation
\$110,000

Trading lab coats for tuxedos, the National Science Foundation's (NSF) National Science Board (NSB) hosted its annual swanky black-tie Awards Ceremony and Dinner in the Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room of the U.S. State Department this year.⁸⁰¹

The evening consisted of a reception, sit-down dinner, and awards ceremony held from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. on May 7.⁸⁰² Approximately 250 guests attended, including members of Congress, government and NSF officials, board members, educators, and scientists.⁸⁰³

Guests were furnished with hors d'oeuvres and white wine at the reception, which lasted 45 minutes. Three courses were served at the sit-down dinner, as well as dessert, red and white wines, and gourmet coffee and tea service. The tables were decorated with centerpiece arrangements and boutonnieres were provided to each of the laureates.⁸⁰⁴

More than \$110,000 was spent to cover the cost of the three hour soirée. This includes \$92,000 for catering and logistics support.⁸⁰⁵ An additional \$15,000 was paid for the venue⁸⁰⁶ and \$3,900 for security.⁸⁰⁷

NSF explains that "as a general rule, appropriated funds are not available for the costs associated with dinners. Accordingly, the decisions of the accounting officers of the government have required congressional authorization before agency appropriations may be used for such expenses." And "Since NSF's authorizing legislation authorizes it to make such expenditures as may be necessary to carry out its functions, [the Government Accountability Office] agreed with Foundation's decision to enhance the recognition value of the award and its recipients by presenting it at an annual awards dinner attended by those prominent in the research community."⁸⁰⁸

Now the dinner itself has won its own award of sorts with a place in Wastebook 2015.

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THE FARCE AWAKENS



A swanky soiree was hosted by the National Science Board in the Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room at the U.S. State Department.

50 THE FISH WHO DIDNT GET AWAY

Maine
Federal funding to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
\$175,000

Everyone has heard the fishing tale of the one that got away. Now federal funding is going to tell the story of the ones that did not get away.

Introducing you to the fish that could be your next seafood dinner is the goal of a smartphone app being developed with \$175,000 provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation⁸⁰⁹ Fisheries Innovation Fund Award.⁸¹⁰ “Major funding” for the grant program is provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).⁸¹¹

The “Boat to Plate” app would allow consumers to trace the path of a piece of New England fish from being caught by a fisherman to the supermarket aisle using their smartphone.⁸¹²

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For example, “after eyeing a piece of haddock on the supermarket counter, a customer scans a code and finds out the fish was caught in the waters of Georges Bank and learns the name of the fishing boat — and maybe even sees a picture of the smiling, rain-slickened fisherman who reeled it in.”⁸¹³

The recipient of the grant, the Midcoast Fishermen’s Association, is working with other New England fishermen groups “to improve the quality, quantity, and timeliness of fisheries dependent data” and “create traceability systems that enable point-of-sale product differentiation for Maine seafood.”⁸¹⁴



A federally funded smart phone app will tell consumers the story of the big fish that did not get away and introduce you to the fisherman who caught it.

The group contends “the technology isn’t about a gimmick so much as survival.”⁸¹⁵

“In an era when many sectors of the New England fishing industry are struggling with depleted resources and choking catch quotas, increasing the cachet of local seafood could be the last, best hope,” claims Ben Martens, executive director of the Maine Coast Fishermen’s Association, which is part of the “Boat to Plate” project.⁸¹⁶ He concedes, however, that “most fishermen don’t want to be involved in this kind of stuff. They want to go out into the water.”⁸¹⁷

Maine, fisherman Terry Alexander dismissed the project, saying “I don’t think it’s anything new, other than that it’s an app, and a bunch of techies are trying to get some money out of it.”⁸¹⁸ He notes that “savvy consumers have long had the ability to trace their fish back to the source.”⁸¹⁹

The app will probably not be available for two years.⁸²⁰

In the meantime, other groups in the region are fishing for their own federal funds. The Fishermen’s Wives Association, for example, has cast a line to catch three federal grants totaling more than \$300,000, including promoting seafood options to high schoolers, free tastings in local restaurants, and cooking demos in a waterfront kitchen.⁸²¹

Spending taxpayer money on projects like this smells a little a little fishy.

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DISTRACTING BILLBOARDS

Colorado
Department of Transportation
\$200,000

Three-dimensional roadside billboards intended to encourage drivers safety in Colorado instead induced road rage in some taxpayers.

The billboards contained a series of phrases, such as “Life or Death,” “Brain Damage” and “Windshield Ejection.”⁸²² A seatbelt, added later, stretches across the second word of each phrase with the tagline “Buckle Up. Seatbelt Enforcement Is On.”⁸²³

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) posted photos of the billboards on Facebook, stating “Hey Colorado! Seen these billboards around? What do you think they are for?”⁸²⁴ Most of the comments left in response were less than supportive, calling the signs confusing, a waste of money that could have been spent to fix potholes, and even a distraction to drivers.

“How bout spending money on the pot holes and not spending money on signs with secret meaning,” stated one commenter.⁸²⁵

Another said “I prefer to keep my eyes on the road when driving rather than reading signs.”⁸²⁶

Attempting to justify the expenditure for the billboards, CDOT responded: “Funds for our safety campaigns come from federal grants designated for safety awareness. These funds cannot be used for infrastructure or filling potholes. There are over 400 traffic fatalities in Colorado every year and most people killed are not wearing their seat belt. Phase 2 of this campaign begins this week - all billboards will include seat belt images to illustrate how seat belts save lives.”⁸²⁷

CDOT spokesman Sam Cole admitted the billboards were confusing, but for a reason. “Week one of the campaign was purposely vague to generate conversation,” and claimed that the response of social media was proof the approach “worked” and did “spark a conversation.”⁸²⁸

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Colorado Department of Transportation

added 2 new photos.

May 15 at 2:05pm · 🌐

Like Page

Hey Colorado! Seen these billboards around? What do you think they're for?



Like · Comment · Share

565 people like this.

Most Relevant



How about "Stop reading our signs and watch out for potholes we are not fixing because we spent all our money on signs."

Like · Reply · 982 · May 15 at 2:18pm

View previous replies



Colorado Department of Transportation

Funds for our safety campaigns come from federal grants designated for safety awareness. These funds cannot be used for infrastructure or filling potholes. There are over 400 traffic fatalities in Colorado every year and most people killed are not wearing their seat belt. Phase 2 of this campaign begins this week - all billboards will include seat belt images to illustrate how seat belts save lives. Let us know what you think.

In addition to the 3D billboards, the seatbelt campaign included billboards, radio advertisements and gas station posters costing a total of \$200,000. That money "came from a \$2 million federal grant awarded to CDOT specifically for campaigns addressing seat belts, impaired driving, pedestrian safety and motorcycle safety," according to local television channel 7NEWS.⁸²⁹

"We have to apply for the funding and show the federal government that we are doing responsible and good things with their money, when it comes to the safety campaigns," said Cole. "We're not just filling potholes. We're not just building new roads. We have a moral obligation to address safety."⁸³⁰

With more than 1,000 bridges in the state classified as either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete, Colorado lacks the funding necessary to make all of the roadways safe.⁸³¹ But as CDOT pointed out, Washington's road rules required the state to spend the money on promoting safe driving rather than making roads and bridges safer.

The federal requirements will likely drive taxpayers crazy because the federal Highway Trust Fund (HTF) is running on empty. The federal government spends about \$16 billion more a year on transportation projects than the

gas tax brings in in revenues.⁸³² As a result, Congress has steered more than \$65 billion from the Treasury general fund into the HTF since 2008.⁸³³ While many politicians are pushing to hike gas taxes to make up the difference, perhaps a better idea would be to put the brakes on lower-priority projects like this one and use the savings to fix potholes and bridges.

Facebook users responded with road rage to Colorado's expenditure of federal transportation funds on billboards intended to encourage the use of seat belts.⁸³⁴

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LIFE-SIZE PAC-MAN

South Carolina
National Science Foundation
PART OF A \$1.2 MILLION GRANT

Perhaps the biggest come-back of 2015 was the classic arcade character Pac-Man.

The video game icon, who races through mazes eating dots and gobbling up cherries and other fruit while trying to avoid running into ghosts, turned 35 years old in 2015 and popped up just about everywhere. The movie “Pixels” featured Pac-Man and other classic arcade classic on the big screen.⁸³⁵ On the web, Google Maps added a feature to transform the map of any city into the layout of a Pac-Man video game.⁸³⁶ A life size Pac-Man game was featured in one of this year’s most memorable Super Bowl ads for Bud Light beer.⁸³⁷

Even the federal government came down with Pac-Man fever. A life-size version of the game was designed on a basketball court as part of a \$1.2 million National Science Foundation (NSF) grant.⁸³⁸

The basketball court at the College of Charleston’s TD Arena in South Carolina was transformed “into a giant, live game of Pac-Man, complete with timers and electronic sensors.”⁸³⁹ The public was invited to try out the game during the TECHFIT Showcase.⁸⁴⁰

The TECHFIT Showcase featuring the life-size Pac-Man game was “the culmination of months of work” as part of a project paid for with a three-year NSF grant “to promote student interest in science, technology, engineering and math through the use of exercise and games,” which is referred to as “exergames.”⁸⁴¹

While the goal of this grant is worthy, there are already a number of games combining exercise and technology available that are popular, such as “Dance, Dance Revolution” and “Wii Fit.” The American College of Sports Medicine notes exergaming is an “appealing option to increase physical activity levels” by individuals “in all populations,” but notes “after participating in Exergaming and enjoying moving, it is hard to imagine they will decide to turn to treadmills, ellipticals, and other stationary, traditional exercises to voluntarily be active.”⁸⁴²

Game over.

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A life-size version of Pac-Man was created as part of a showcase sponsored by the National Science Foundation grant.⁸⁴³

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DISABILITY FOR NON-ENGLISH SPEAKERS

**Puerto Rico
Social Security Administration
AT LEAST \$2.6 MILLION**

No hablo Ingles?

While not being able to speak English could pose challenges to Spanish speaking citizens and visitors seeking a job in many parts of the United States, it certainly would not in the U.S. Commonwealth of Puerto Rico where not speaking Spanish would probably be a bigger obstacle. At least 95 percent of the residents of Puerto Rico speak Spanish while 84 percent say they do not speak English “very well.”⁸⁴⁴

Yet, the Social Security Administration (SSA) is spending millions of dollars paying Social Security Disability Insurance (DI) benefits to hundreds of Puerto Ricans because they do not speak English.

SSA’s policy is applied nationwide and does not take into consideration “local conditions,” a SSA Office of Inspector General (OIG) review revealed⁸⁴⁵

“SSA policy does not differentiate between someone who is unable to communicate in English and someone who is illiterate in any language,” the SSA OIG found.⁸⁴⁶

“A Spanish-speaking claimant who performed ‘skilled’ work in Puerto Rico, such as a nurse, could be determined ‘unskilled’” by SSA policy, according to the OIG.⁸⁴⁷

“SSA has applied the medical-vocational guidelines nationally and does not make exceptions for claimants who reside in Puerto Rico where both Spanish and English are the official languages. The guidelines assume individuals who are unable to communicate in English are limited in their ability to find a job in the regional or national economy where English is the predominant language, even though residents of Puerto Rico may be able to find local work with their Spanish-speaking skills.”⁸⁴⁸

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The SSA policy contradicts a 1987 court ruling. A U.S. District Court upheld a U.S. Court of Appeals decision “that, for the most part, it is the ability to communicate in Spanish, not English, that is vocationally important in Puerto Rico.”⁸⁴⁹

Since that time the use of the Spanish language in many parts of the U.S. has increased dramatically. Spanish is used by 35.8 million Hispanics in the U.S. plus an additional 2.6 million non-Hispanics, making it the most spoken non-English language in the country.⁸⁵⁰

Yet, “a claimant asserting an inability to read, write, or communicate in English may increase his/her likelihood of receiving disability benefits” in Puerto Rico.⁸⁵¹

SSA does not track how many beneficiaries receive financial benefits due to their lack of English proficiency. A sample review by the SSA OIG, however, identified 218 cases “related to an inability to communicate in English” in Puerto Rico.⁸⁵² The average monthly disability payment for someone living in Puerto Rico is more than \$1,000.⁸⁵³ That means at least \$2.6 million is being spent annually providing disability benefits to Puerto Ricans because they cannot speak English.

Paying millions of dollars of benefits to those who are not disabled is not just wasteful, but it also threatens to cut support for those who are truly disabled by accelerating the impending bankruptcy of the DI Trust Fund.

DI reserves will be depleted next year, which will trigger automatic payment cuts to beneficiaries.⁸⁵⁴ “At the time reserves are depleted, continuing income to the DI Trust Fund would be sufficient to pay 81 percent of scheduled DI benefits,” warned the 2015 Social Security trustees report.⁸⁵⁵

No matter what language you speak, the government’s policy to regard Puerto Rican citizens as illiterate or disabled because they do not speak English is estúpido and muy dispendioso.

Even SSA seems to agree. The agency concurred with the OIG recommendations to count the number of beneficiaries awarded disability based on their inability to communicate in English and to “evaluate the appropriateness” of using the “inability to communicate in English” when determining disability benefits eligibility.”⁸⁵⁶

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60 PUPPET SHOWS

California, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois,
New York and Texas
National Endowment for the Arts
\$115,000

“Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type” tells the story of cows that discover an old typewriter in a barn and start typing grievances and demands to Farmer Brown. The children’s story was adapted into a puppet show by the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, Georgia, with the support of a \$30,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) this year.⁸⁵⁷

But hold on, how many children even know what a typewriter is???

That is all part of the educational experience. Those who are too young to have ever seen an actual typewriter were “able to see, touch, and type on a real typewriter” as a special feature of the “Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type” puppet show.⁸⁵⁸

Despite the taxpayer assistance to support the production, the public was still required to purchase tickets for \$16.50 each to attend the show and see the puppet cows use a typewriter.⁸⁵⁹

This was just one of the six puppet projects the NEA spent \$100,000 on in 2015.⁸⁶⁰ The others included:

- The Union Internationale de la Marionnette (UNIMA) received \$10,000 to “support the publication of ‘Puppetry International’ magazine, a resource website, and electronic communication services for the puppetry field.”⁸⁶¹ According to the NEA, “‘Puppetry International’ magazine informs and educates the field through scholarly writings on puppetry in theater, film, and media” and UNIMA’s “website and electronic communication services are home to the ‘Puppetry Yellow Pages.’”⁸⁶²
- The Family Puppet Festival, featuring “interactive performances, roaming marionettes, giant puppets, live music, and puppet-making workshops” held April 12, 2015 in Los Angeles, California, was supported with a \$25,000 grant to the Skirball Cultural Center.
- The National Puppetry Festival held August 10– 16, 2015, at the University of Connecticut in Storrs that featured performances, workshops, “scholarly presentations,” a film and a parade received a \$10,000 grant.⁸⁶³

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- Great Small Works of New York was awarded \$10,000 to support a “Toy Theater” tour of small-scale theatrical puppet works throughout New England.⁸⁶⁴
- Chicago’s Lucky Plush Productions received \$20,000 to create a new work balancing “performance, puppetry, and projection, unfolding like a graphic novel” during a residency on Martha’s Vineyard.⁸⁶⁵
- The Discovery Green Conservancy in Houston, Texas festival spent a \$10,000 grant for a “downtown parade of circus arts performers led by giant puppets” and workshops to “create large-scale puppets” led by puppet masters.⁸⁶⁶

Children were introduced to typewriters and were even “able to see, touch, and type on a real typewriter” as a special feature of the “Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type” puppet show.⁸⁶⁷

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES



What's a typewriter??

Have your kids ever seen a typewriter? When you visit us during *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type*, your children will be able to see, touch, and type on a real typewriter. Then, they'll see the cows type in the show! Free with admission to the Center.

A bird puppet “takes its first flight” during the finale of the Family Puppet Festival held in Los Angeles.⁸⁶⁸



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HOTEL SHOWER MONITOR

Oklahoma
Environmental Protection Agency
\$15,000

The federal government is financing the development of a device to monitor how long you are showering and how much water you are using as a hotel guest.

“It is anticipated that this project will provide a low cost, accurate, small size, low power, wireless device for monitoring water use from hotel showers,” according to the proposal.⁸⁶⁹ The device will “be marketed to the hotel industry” as a way of reducing costs by “modifying” the behavior of hotel guests.⁸⁷⁰ The researchers hope the technology will be “adopted by all major hotels and used across the country.”⁸⁷¹

The grant recipient says “most hotels do not monitor individual guest water usage and as a result, millions of gallons of potable water are wasted every year by hotel guests.”⁸⁷² The device would allow them to do so by tracking shower use by guests and transmitting that data to a “central hotel accounting system.”⁸⁷³

“The device seeks to get hotel guests to limit their showers to seven minutes as a start,” an associate professor at the University of Tulsa’s School of Chemical Engineering who is working on the project told *The Washington Free Beacon*.⁸⁷⁴

Following publication of the article about the agency’s funding of the effort in *The Washington Free Beacon*, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) deputy press secretary stated the “EPA is not monitoring how much time hotel guests spend in the shower.”

The University of Tulsa received a \$15,000 grant from EPA for the project, which is being conducted by a team of undergraduate students.⁸⁷⁵

The concept is not new and neither is federal funding for it.

The Department of Energy and the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory grants have supported the prototyping and testing of a shower head with LED lights that gradually turn

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from green to red over seven minutes that was developed by three Tufts University grads as part of a mechanical engineering class .⁸⁷⁶



Uncle Sam wants you to take shorter showers and is financing efforts to monitor how long you spend in the shower when staying at a hotel.

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IT INSECURITY

Nation wide
Government wide
\$1 BILLION

The names, addresses, Social Security numbers, health histories, financial data, and other private information of more than 21 million Americans was stolen from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) computer network by hackers.⁸⁷⁷ The Chinese are believed to have been behind the heist and it is unknown how the personal information, which includes over five million fingerprints, is intended to be used.^{878 879}

The networks of other federal agencies, including the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), have also been breached.⁸⁸⁰ Russian hackers even gained access to the networks of the Pentagon,⁸⁸¹ State Department and White House, including “real-time non-public details of the president’s schedule.”⁸⁸²

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) warned “the danger posed by the wide array of cyber threats facing the nation is heightened by weaknesses in the federal government’s approach to protecting its systems and information.”⁸⁸³

“Federal IT chiefs often cite inadequate funding as the biggest inhibitor to progress, but a thorough investigation of the overall federal government IT sector reveals that cost savings and IT security would be increased by a comprehensive [Information Technology Asset Management (ITAM)] program at the national government level in the U.S.,” concluded an analysis by the International Association of Information Technology Asset Managers (IAITAM).⁸⁸⁴

“AITAM’s review of federal agencies found that while the hacks and breaches get all the attention, the waste of taxpayer dollars is every bit as troubling.”⁸⁸⁵

Instead of a shortage of funding for IT and cybersecurity, the independent analysis found the opposite: “Enormous bloat and inefficiencies at the federal level.”⁸⁸⁶

The national president of the American Federation of Government Employees agreed, saying “the problem is that federal agencies’ spending on information technology and products

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is out of control.” He pointed to “frequent scandals caused by contractor blunders — from the healthcare.gov meltdown to the hacking of the Armed Forces Network.”⁸⁸⁷

“Better control of inventory, software licensing, upgrades, and so on, will actually reduce the risk of more federal government IT failures,” AITAM concluded. “Conversely, spending greater and greater sums without proper ITAM controls in place is a prescription for more breaches, risks posed by unauthorized devices, increases in lost and stolen hard drives, and major vulnerabilities created by outdated and/or ‘unpatched’ software.”⁸⁸⁸

The savings from adopting these practices “would add up to well over \$30 billion, of which only a tiny fraction would be needed to put in place needed ITAM controls on overall federal IT and IT Security.”⁸⁸⁹

IAITAM cites numerous examples of waste and mismanagement. In a single contract the IRS wasted \$11.6 million for unused software.⁸⁹⁰ The Department of Energy spent nearly \$2.6 million on unnecessary software licenses and improperly managed hardware acquisitions.⁸⁹¹

A number of departments, including the VA and Education, suffer from “recurring unfixed issues.”⁸⁹² The VA, for example, has failed an annual cybersecurity audit for 16 consecutive years. “Even after a dramatic cyber hack was detected in 2012, a GAO report from



“Enormous bloat and inefficiencies” are compromising federal cybersecurity, which has allowed hackers to gain access to the White House network, including details of the president’s private schedule

November 2014 found that the ‘VA has not addressed an underlying vulnerability that allowed the incident to occur.’”⁸⁹³

The IAITAM notes “the Department of Homeland Security alone saved \$181 million in software licensing in one recent year, and that more than \$1 billion could be saved in information technology and telecommunications per year across the federal government if best practices were applied.”⁸⁹⁴

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63

SMOKING IN RUSSIA

Arkansas
National Institutes of Health
\$121,000

“Right now, we have the high-tech equivalent of the \$436 Pentagon hammer and it’s just getting worse,” said IAITAM CEO Barbara Rembiesa.⁸⁹⁵

The oppressive Soviet Union failed to stop Russians from lighting up despite repeated government efforts. Not even the threat of being exiled to Siberia was enough to deter Russians from smoking.⁸⁹⁶ In fact, during the Soviet era, cigarette shortages “sparked riots”⁸⁹⁷ and smokers would often stand in long lines for hours for cigarettes.⁸⁹⁸ Some stores even sold used cigarette butts.⁸⁹⁹

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is spending \$121,250 to study the “culture of smoking” in Russia.⁹⁰⁰ The findings will be published in a book entitled “Cigarettes and Soviets: The Culture of Tobacco Use in Modern Russia” to be authored by Trish Starks, a historian at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.⁹⁰¹ The NIH “grant money mainly will be used to pay for a teaching substitute while Starks writes the book, she said.”⁹⁰²

“The goal of this project is to create an ambitious and encompassing social, cultural, and gendered history of tobacco in Russia,” explains Starks.⁹⁰³ “Expanding beyond policy reports and internal ministry memos, the monograph will reconstruct the culture of tobacco using newspapers, journals, industry publications, etiquette manuals, propaganda posters, popular literature, films, cartoons, and advertising images.”⁹⁰⁴

“The Soviets were the first government in the world to attempt a national attack on tobacco use in 1920, but they failed,” according to Starks.⁹⁰⁵ She adds “the resurrection of anti-tobacco initiatives in the 1970s also collapsed.”⁹⁰⁶

President Vladimir Putin signed a new law in February 2013 that raised the minimum price on cigarettes, “although at approximately \$1.50 a pack they are still considerably less expensive than in the West.”⁹⁰⁷ The law also outlawed smoking in “recreational areas,” such as parks and beaches, and in most public buildings.⁹⁰⁸ However, “many residents push back against the laws.”⁹⁰⁹ As part of the enforcement, Russia’s Ministry of Health “initiated” a

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The U.S. National Institutes of Health is paying to have a book written about the culture of tobacco use in Russia, where the government has tried nearly everything—including encouraging citizens to turn one another in—to break the nation’s smoking habit

“service” this year that encourages citizens to report those ignoring the ban to the government. A smartphone app allows users to “take a photo of an establishment where the ban on smoking in public places is violated and send it to the authorities” or “to notify the authorities about individuals” who are smoking.⁹¹⁰

“When Russians first heard that there would be health warnings on their cigarette packs, they were more concerned that the cost was going to go up than if smoking led to cancer,” Starks said.⁹¹¹

There are 44 million smokers in Russia.⁹¹² About 60 percent of men and 25 percent of women in Russia smoke, making the country one of the largest cigarette markets in the world.⁹¹³

“About 400,000 Russians die from

smoking-related illnesses each year – more than two times the number of smoking-related deaths per capita in the United States.”⁹¹⁴

Despite the growing rift between the U.S. and Russia, a Bilateral Presidential Commission was established in 2009 to coordinate programs between the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Russian Ministry of Health and Social Development,⁹¹⁵ “including tobacco control initiatives.”⁹¹⁶ Starks says “understanding Russia’s distinctive history may suggest different strategies” because “the unique history of tobacco in Russia suggests that programs undertaken by the Health Working Group may fail if they are based solely on policy shown to be effective in other countries.”⁹¹⁷

Perhaps this funding could have been better spent researching how to save the lives of the more than 480,000 Americans who die every year as a result of smoking, which remains the leading cause of preventable death in our nation.⁹¹⁸

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64 **VA ARTWORK AND JUNKETS**

California and elsewhere
Department of Veterans Affairs
\$40 MILLION

After headlines exposed veterans dying while waiting for care, the President last year signed a bill providing billions of dollars to improve access to timely care by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Today, the number of veterans waiting to see a doctor has increased 50 percent.⁹¹⁹ During this time, the VA spent billions more than it was budgeted and has threatened to lay off staff to make up for the shortfall.⁹²⁰



"Horizon" on the side of the parking garage behind the administration building cost \$285,000.

This fall, taxpayers were forced to bail out the VA again. This time Congress passed legislation allowing the VA to redirect \$625 million from other accounts to rescue a construction project in Aurora, Colorado that is now projected to cost three times more than estimated just last

year.⁹²¹ The price tag to complete the half-finished hospital has climbed to nearly \$1.7 billion and the Corps of Engineers is blaming "the overruns on multiple design changes and a decision by VA officials to use a complicated contract process they didn't fully understand."⁹²²

Despite all of these financial and administrative challenges, the VA continues to spend millions of dollars on unnecessary junkets and artwork.

The VA Palo Alto Health Care System in California spent "at least \$6.3 million on art and consulting services," according to Congressman Jeff Miller, the Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.⁹²³

The \$1.3 million price tag for the renovation of the courtyard of the Mental Health Center includes \$482,960 spent on a giant rock and \$807,310 for "site preparation."⁹²⁴ The

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"Blue Eclipse" in the entry plaza of the Mental Health Center cost \$250,000.

rock, "cut into cubes with a laser and pieced together," is meant to evoke "a sense of transformation, rebuilding, and self-investigation," according to the designers.⁹²⁵

The VA also spent \$365,000 for a stainless steel and aluminum sculpture in the aquatic center entrance and \$305,000 for another sculpture in an exterior lobby. A sculpture in the shape of a half arc located inside the mental health center cost \$330,000, while an art installation on the side of a parking garage displaying quotes by Abraham Lincoln and Eleanor Roosevelt that lights up in Morse code cost \$285,000.⁹²⁶

"As many of these projects are not yet complete, these costs actually could increase," Chairman Miller points out.⁹²⁷

These new pieces added to the VA's collection follow the department's \$1.8 million purchase of artwork in September 2014.⁹²⁸



"Aggregate" in the courtyard of the Mental Health Center, cost \$1,290,270, which includes \$482,960 for the rock sculpture and \$807,310 for site preparation

In addition to the millions spent on artwork, the VA has also rung up more than \$33.4 million for junkets to conferences in fiscal year 2015 alone.⁹²⁹

"Spending money on conferences and relocation expenses for VA employees and on art installations for VA facilities is not more important than taking care of the veterans of this Nation, providing them the health care that they have earned," Chairman Miller said on the floor of the House of Representatives.

"It is simply beyond me why VA would choose to pay to complete the Denver project by cutting medical services and medical facility dollars, but not the exorbitant conference spending, bloated relocation expenses, or art."⁹³⁰

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65 STATE FAIR COMPETITIONS

California
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$65,000

Corn dog and pie eating and livestock and crafts competitions at the California State Fair have been joined by a new competition—the best extra-virgin olive oil in the state—thanks to a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

“In 2015, the California State Fair will introduce its inaugural Extra Virgin Olive Oil competition, exclusively for California producers. In addition, the 2015 Fair will host a special California Extra Virgin Olive Oil exhibit featuring a display of the award-winning Extra Virgin Olive Oils, fun and interactive educational displays, free tastings, and market research surveys for the Fair’s 750,000 annual guests. The goal is to promote the awareness and availability of award-winning California Extra Virgin Olive Oils. This project is supported by the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through Grant 14-SCBGPCA-0006.”⁹³¹

The USDA grant supporting the contest totals \$115,000, which is spread over three years. “This year’s allotment, \$65,000, is being used to launch the competition and spread public awareness.”⁹³²

The judges “tasted roughly 140 oils” and awarded medals to 78.⁹³³ The Olive Press won the title “Best of Show” in the competition.⁹³⁴

“The California State Fair prides itself in showcasing California’s best commercial wine, cheese and beer. Now, California Extra Virgin Olive Oil is taking its place among them,” proclaimed a brochure printed to promote the competition.⁹³⁵

The state’s “olive oil producers are betting” this “new competition at the California State Fair will further distinguish the quality of their extra-virgin products from the mass-produced oil that consumers can get for half the price at supermarkets.”⁹³⁶

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"The fair officials give you a little seal to put on the bottle so that when it's on the shelf, there's a reason for somebody to consider it," pointed out one of the contestants in the state fair competition.⁹³⁷

But the actual impact for most of those who entered the competition may be limited since "many of the State Fair's medal winners also had received honors in the prestigious international competitions in Los Angeles and New York." In fact, the supervisor of the Los Angeles County Fair Association contest points out because there are so many olive oil competitions, producers have to make "hard choices as new contests emerge" as to whether or not to enter yet another.⁹³⁸

USDA is spending \$115,000 to host competitions at the California State Fair.

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66 CAT TALES

New York
Department of Interior
\$300,000

Not every American who achieved a great feat is a household name, or even human!

Many may not know the name of the monkey astronaut Miss Baker, who was the first U.S. animal to fly in space and return alive, for example.⁹³⁹

Even fewer have ever heard of the cat lagara or know that she was the first feline to survive a trip over Niagara Falls. That could all change thanks to federal funding for a marketing plan to promote the cat's tale and other less known stories and attractions in the Niagara area of New York.⁹⁴⁰

lagara's voyage over the falls was merely a trial run⁹⁴¹ for the fateful trip by Annie Edson Taylor. The 62-year-old retired charm school teacher⁹⁴² was "strapped for cash and seeking fame" and decided "the perfect attention-getting stunt" would be going over Niagara Falls in a barrel.⁹⁴³

When her cat survived the test run, Taylor decided to take the plunge herself.⁹⁴⁴ She did it in a five foot tall wooden pickle barrel lined with cushions, becoming the first person to go over Niagara Falls in a barrel.⁹⁴⁵ She was not the first person to survive a trip down the falls however. In 1829, Sam Patch survived a jump down the 175-foot Horseshoe Falls on the Canadian side of the border.⁹⁴⁶

"Those tidbits and more are at the center of new marketing effort by Niagara Falls National Heritage Area to use its history as means to attract more tourists to not only the falls but to other parts of Niagara County and the region."⁹⁴⁷

Chris Van Allsburg, the author of the children's book "Queen of the Falls" about Taylor's voyage, notes it "didn't bring her the fame or fortune she expected."⁹⁴⁸

But that hasn't stopped others from cashing in on her stunt.

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Congressman Brian Higgins, who “was able to secure a \$300,000 federal grant to help with the marketing plan,” that includes her tale. Higgins says “this is for future generations so that they can know the story of Niagara Falls.”⁹⁴⁹

Some of the funds also paid for the printing of a “Discover Niagara” map for tourists. The purpose is to get visitors to stay longer in that area, according to Niagara Falls National Heritage Area president Tom Chambers. “This challenges the notion that there is nothing to do in Niagara Falls. There’s actually a lot to do.”⁹⁵⁰

Going over the falls is probably not one of those things he has in mind, but Taylor’s trip has inspired copy-cats—only ten of which survived the plunge.⁹⁵¹

A \$300,000 federal grant will retell the tale of the voyages of a retired charm school teacher and her cat over Niagara Falls in a barrel.

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67

FREE RENT FOR FREELOADERS

Nationwide
Department of Housing and Urban Development
\$448 MILLION

The federal government spends nearly \$40 million a month paying the rent for over 100,000 tenants who are not complying with the requirements for the subsidies while others who could qualify are on waiting lists for housing assistance.⁹⁵²

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Service and Self-sufficiency Requirement (CSSR) program was created to provide public housing residents “a greater stake in their communities” and “improving their own economic and social well-being” by giving “something back.”⁹⁵³ CSSR attempted to do this by requiring adult recipients who are not elderly or disabled to perform 8 hours of community service each month or participate in job training, education, or other self-sufficiency program.⁹⁵⁴

HUD is paying about \$37 million each month subsidizing at least 106,000 households not complying with these requirements, which makes them ineligible for the help. This funding “could have otherwise housed compliant tenants,” according to a review by the HUD Office of Inspector General (OIG).⁹⁵⁵ “Potential tenants were kept on waiting lists, while tenants who were noncompliant with CSSR continued to live in subsidized housing.”⁹⁵⁶

The HUD OIG says it “initiated this audit based on several media reports of housing authorities not enforcing CSSR or only recently stressing its enforcement.”⁹⁵⁷

The review found “HUD did not apply sanctions against housing authorities that failed to enforce CSSR compliance” even though it has the legal authority to “terminate, withhold, or reduce assistance payments to housing authorities that fail to comply with its requirements.”⁹⁵⁸ HUD admitted “some housing authorities wanted to take action, such as eviction,” but the department blamed “certain jurisdictions” that “made it difficult to evict anyone for noncompliance with CSSR.”⁹⁵⁹ The OIG said “HUD must enforce the Act by supporting housing authorities that follow CSSR by not renewing the leases of noncompliant tenants.”⁹⁶⁰

The OIG alerted HUD to “the same problem” in 2008, but the department never developed “an effective tool for monitoring housing authorities’ compliance with CSSR.”⁹⁶¹

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“If HUD does not strengthen its controls,” the OIG concluded, taxpayers “will pay at least \$448 million over the next year in subsidies for public housing units occupied by noncompliant tenants that otherwise could house compliant households.”⁹⁶²

68

EMPTY BUILDINGS IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan
Department of Defense
\$110 MILLION

The U.S. is spending \$110 million a year to maintain hundreds of empty, unused and excess buildings in Afghanistan.⁹⁶³

The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces continue to maintain over 360 “excess facilities” that the U.S. government pays the bill to light, heat, and repair.⁹⁶⁴

“The old buildings were supposed to be disposed of,” according to a report to Congress from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), “but the Afghan ministries receiving security aid hung on to many of the old structures.”⁹⁶⁵

And while money was being wasted to heat and light unused buildings, “Afghan soldiers in Kandahar had no lights or heat for three nights,” according to the report.⁹⁶⁶

The resources being wasted maintaining unused buildings could be applied to other purposes notes U.S. Army Major General Todd Semonite, the Commanding General of the Combined Security Assistance Command-Afghanistan.⁹⁶⁷ “So Semonite is giving his Afghan partners choices: donate, sell, or demolish excess facilities, or lose aid money,” according to a Quarterly Report to the United States Congress from SIGAR. “If we don’t continue to prove to donors that we’re spending money wisely, the money will go away,” said Semonite.⁹⁶⁸

A \$14.7 million warehouse facility in Kandahar was never used as a result of “lengthy construction delays” but that did not stop \$400,000 in modifications from being made to the complex after it was clear it would not be needed, according to a separate SIGAR report issued this year.⁹⁶⁹ “U.S. advisors will provide cost data on operating and maintaining the facility to the Afghan Base Closure Commission,” SIGAR noted.⁹⁷⁰

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Derided as “Boondoggle HQ,” ProPublica revealed at least \$25 million was spent on another unused facility. The lavish headquarters “wasn’t needed, wasn’t wanted and wasn’t ever used.”⁹⁷¹ It costs \$108,300 a month to operate, but would cost nearly \$2 million to demolish.⁹⁷² Three generals tried to kill the project, but they were overruled.⁹⁷³ “The request to cancel the building was rejected by then-Major General Peter M. Vangjel, who believed that it would not be ‘prudent’ to cancel a project for which funds had already been appropriated by Congress,” according to SIGAR.⁹⁷⁴ “The building was never used and “the failure” to “cancel the 64K building resulted in the waste of about \$36 million.”⁹⁷⁵ The U.S. Army General who approved the building’s construction was later promoted to lieutenant general and then made the Army’s inspector general in charge of identifying waste, fraud, and abuse.⁹⁷⁶



The general who refused to cancel the construction of an unneeded, unwanted, and unused building in Afghanistan that squandered \$36 million was later made the Army’s inspector general in charge of identifying waste, fraud, and abuse.

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69 VIRTUAL HAUNTED HOUSE

Arizona
The Institute of Museum and Library Services
\$9,450

With the percentage of Americans visiting a library declining,⁹⁷⁷ is walking through a public library these days like taking a trip to an uninhabited planet like Mars or tiptoeing through a dusty old building full of cobwebs and ghosts?

The answer could be “yes” if you are at the Maricopa Public Library in Arizona.

A \$9,450 Institute of Museum and Library Services grant provided through the Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records⁹⁷⁸ is paying for the library to “get into 3D gaming.”⁹⁷⁹

“The funds will go toward developing a virtual reality gaming program,” according to the library manager Erik Surber.⁹⁸⁰

Surber said “the money will buy three virtual reality headsets” that will “allow users to take virtual field trips to a variety of places and will come pre-installed with the 3-D world-building game Minecraft.”⁹⁸¹ He plans “to design a virtual haunted house for the next Halloween season.”⁹⁸²

Surber says the 3D video gaming program is “a lot of fun” but insists that it will also be educational.⁹⁸³ He “hopes Maricopa kids and adults can take a virtual trip to outer space—or into a haunted house” and even “land on Mars” with the program.^{984 985}

By contrast, the Casa Grande Public Library received a \$33,165 grant that is being spent, in part, to update its English as a second language program.⁹⁸⁶

The use of these grant funds is “a sign of the changing times at Arizona libraries,” explains the office of the Arizona State Library, noting “the libraries receiving awards this spring reflect the transformation taking place in libraries statewide.”⁹⁸⁷

All institutions must keep pace with the changing times and expectations of users while maintaining the unique role they serve. For libraries, this is to provide the public access to

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publications, movies, and recordings for education, reference or enjoyment. Libraries offer many other services, such as use of computers, access to the internet or—as is the case with the Casa Grande Public Library—language lessons. The federal government should support these rather than exchanging books for video games and turning libraries into arcades and haunted houses.



An Arizona public library will become a virtual haunted house with the financial support of a federal grant.

70 RAINBOW RAILROAD LIGHTS

Tennessee
Department of Transportation
\$2.8 MILLION

Green, blue, red and white LED lights now cover the full length of the RJ Corman railroad bridge spanning the Cumberland River in Clarksville, Tennessee, thanks to millions of dollars provided by taxpayers.

Rust on the bridge was removed and then repainted silver. LED lights were added that promise to “light up the nights” in an assortment of rainbow colors.⁹⁸⁸ The colors can be changed for special occasions, including “holidays, sporting events or to reflect a school’s colors.”⁹⁸⁹

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“There are 104 fixtures lighting up the trusses, each one has an array of red, green, blue and white LEDs,” explained Richard Davis of the Ardee Design Group. “In programing, I can vary the intensity of each set of arrays to mix just about any color we want. We can also control each fixture individually, which is how we get the rainbow effect from one side of the bridge to the other,” said Davis.⁹⁹⁰

Clarksville Mayor Kim McMillan said “we’ve been working a long time, along with Montgomery County and RJ Corman, to have it painted and lighted to make it an exciting part of the Riverside Drive area. I think it’s another step in creating interest in this area, and it certainly brings a new element to Clarksville.”⁹⁹¹

Two separate Transportation Enhancement grants funded by the Department of Transportation provided \$2.3 million for the project.⁹⁹² In total, the federal government allocated \$2,777,641, or 80 percent, of the total \$3.1 million budget of the project.⁹⁹³ The city of Clarksville and Montgomery County each paid just 5 percent of the cost of the bridge rehab project and will “each contribute \$55,000 of the \$550,000 to light it, with a federal grant paying the rest.”⁹⁹⁴

RJ Corman Railroad Group, the private company that owns the railroad and the bridge, pitched in \$292,205, only 10 percent of the cost of the project.⁹⁹⁵ The company, described as “incredibly profitable” by its owner who recently passed away, “takes in around \$300 million a year.”⁹⁹⁶

“This grant was spearheaded by a consultant for the RJ Corman Company who wrote it up and brought it to the county,” according to Clarksville TN Online. “The taxpayers are basically being asked to give the RJ Corman company corporate welfare. Sure, the county is asking for the grant, which is mostly free money as far as they are concerned, but in the end it still comes out of the taxpayers pockets,” noted an editorial on the site. “The bridge could be reasonably called an eye sore, due to its current state. It is past the time to require the RJ Corman Company to perform the maintenance, that they should have been doing all along.”⁹⁹⁷

Some in Clarksville questioned why public money would be spent to light the bridge when there were other pressing needs in the community.

“Now watch light bills shoot up to \$400 like it dos around christmas,” one resident posted on the ClarksvilleNOW discussion page. “How about fixing sinkholes, improving education, give our youth more to do to keep them out the streets.”⁹⁹⁸

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“With all the pot holes and bad roads here in clarksville i am so glad to see our city using its money wisely.... at least now if we blow a tire on riverside dr we will have some pretty lights to look at???,” lamented another resident.⁹⁹⁹

Coincidentally, the day before the bridge’s official lighting ceremony, which occurred the evening of St. Patrick’s Day,¹⁰⁰⁰ the communications director of the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) announced “we’re getting an overwhelming number of phone calls” about damage to cars caused by potholes in the state.¹⁰⁰¹ The department was receiving 10 to 20 claims a day earlier this year, she said, noting “it’s going to be a big year” for making compensation payments due to “negligence on state-run roads.”¹⁰⁰² “The damaging potholes are all over the Midstate, ranging from the size of a basketball to a small car,” reported Nashville television station WSMV-4 in March.¹⁰⁰³

In addition to the costs of repairing potholes and compensating drivers for the damage they cause, the state needs funding to fix many of its bridges. “About three percent of the state’s 8,000 bridges are structurally deficient, meaning they are in need of repair or a full replacement.”¹⁰⁰⁴ Some of these bridges “will sit for months or years before the state will be able to get those jobs done” because TDOT says “it can only fix what it has the money for, so they look for trouble spots they consider a high priority.”¹⁰⁰⁵

“It’s so important to remember funding is an issue,” the TDOT spokeswoman pointed out.¹⁰⁰⁶ This is precisely why taxpayers are questioning why transportation funds are being diverted from roads to transform a private bridge into a kaleidoscope of lights.



Federal transportation funds paid to refurbish and add rainbow lights to this privately owned rail road bridge in Tennessee.

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71

WINDOWS XP

Nationwide
Internal Revenue Service and Department of Defense
MORE THAN \$9.5 MILLION

For more than six years, federal officials were aware Microsoft was ending free support for Windows XP on April 8, 2014, leaving computers continuing to use the software vulnerable to hackers.¹⁰⁰⁷

Yet, the Department of Defense, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and a number of other federal agencies are still using it and paying Microsoft millions of dollars for IT support for the now defunct operating system.

Microsoft warned customers years in advance “there will be no more security updates or technical support for the Windows XP operating system.” Without security updates, a “PC may become vulnerable to harmful viruses, spyware, and other malicious software which can steal or damage your business data and information.”¹⁰⁰⁸

In April 2012, the Department of Homeland Security sent the White House’s Office of Management and Budget “a draft plan for warning federal agencies that they needed to prioritize moving their computers off of Windows XP before Microsoft ended support, but OMB officials never acted on the plan.”¹⁰⁰⁹

Ten percent of government computers continued running after the 2014 expiration date, including “thousands of computers on classified military and diplomatic networks, U.S. officials said.”¹⁰¹⁰

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NASA Mission Control Center still using defunct Windows XP.

“Some federal officials said that they asked Microsoft to extend its deadline for ending support for Windows XP. The company declined and instead offered — for new fees — ‘custom support agreements’ that give protection that likely will fall short of what the company long has provided to most XP users for free.”¹⁰¹¹

The IRS claims it is paying Microsoft “less than \$500,000” for continued Windows XP support.¹⁰¹²

Windows XP is apparently not the only outdated technology the IRS still relies upon. The agency still uses some tech from “when John F. Kennedy was president,” admits Commissioner John Koskinen.¹⁰¹³ Some IRS systems, he noted, still use the COBOL programming language, which *Computer World* once described as “a programming dinosaur that was last hot in the 1980s.”¹⁰¹⁴

Commissioner Koskinen concedes “we are very concerned if we don’t complete that work we’re going to have an unstable environment in terms of security.”¹⁰¹⁵

Even more baffling is that while the IRS is needlessly paying for support on outdated software, the agency is cutting how much it spends on cybersecurity overall. In 2014, the IRS spent \$10 million less on cybersecurity than the previous year, according to a view by CNNMoney.¹⁰¹⁶ “Since 2011, its 410-person cybersecurity team—in charge of guarding the entire nation’s tax records—has been cut down to 363 people.”¹⁰¹⁷ The IRS revealed that hackers have already accessed more than the accounts of 330,000 taxpayers, including their past tax returns.¹⁰¹⁸

Like the IRS, the Army and Navy have been slow keeping pace with modernization in technology.

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“The Navy relies on a number of legacy applications and programs that are reliant on legacy Windows products,” said Steven Davis, spokesman for Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command. “Until those applications and programs are modernized or phased out, this continuity of services is required to maintain operational effectiveness.”¹⁰¹⁹

The Navy is paying Microsoft \$9 million for continued support on Windows XP.¹⁰²⁰ The Navy hopes to complete an upgrade to the newer version of Windows by July 2016, but already has a contingency plan to continue paying for Windows XP support until June 2017.¹⁰²¹ This would bring the Navy’s total cost of not switching over to the new program to almost \$31 million.¹⁰²²

Even though Microsoft notified customers that Windows XP support would end in April 2014, the Navy did not require that upgrades be made until months after the deadline passed.¹⁰²³

Like the IRS, the Navy has also had its systems hacked. “Iranian cyberspies spent several months moving within the service’s unclassified system before being detected and expelled.”¹⁰²⁴

The Army has a contract with Microsoft for extended Windows XP support for “over 8,000 devices” that are continuing to use the software “while the Army works to migrate off Windows XP over the next year.”¹⁰²⁵

“For all the money we collectively give Microsoft, they were not too receptive to extending the deadline,” a senior State Department official grumbled.¹⁰²⁶

Perhaps that is a fair point, but the company did give agencies six years notice to have adequate time and resources to install more secure operating systems.

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72

TRUANCY APP

Missouri
National Science Foundation
\$50,000

Bueller?

Bueller?

Bueller?

Ben Stein's deadpan performance calling the roll of students to check attendance in "*Ferris Bueller's Day Off*" remains an enduring buzzword often used when no one responds to a question.

But could this daily routine that starts the school day in nearly every homeroom become obsolete and replaced by a government sponsored smartphone truancy app that literally sees who is and who is not present in a classroom?

That is the goal of a Missouri University of Science and Technology team attempting to develop a smartphone app that would take attendance for teachers based upon facial recognition with the financial assistance of a \$50,000 grant from the National Science Foundation.¹⁰²⁷

The app would be installed on a teacher's Smartphone. In the first class, the phone's camera would be used to take videos of the students' faces. The app would then assemble a "face dataset" with every face being tagged so each could be recognized. "Face tracklets" would record "multiple instances of the same individual with variations in poses."¹⁰²⁸ Instead of calling the roll, a teacher would take videos of the class and the app would do an "automated attendance check."¹⁰²⁹

The researchers contend the app is necessary because traditional methods of checking attendance which either require an instructor to identify each student one by one or students to sign an attendance sheet are problematic. First, "reading students' names may occupy minutes of lecture time when the number of students is large."¹⁰³⁰ Second, entrusting students

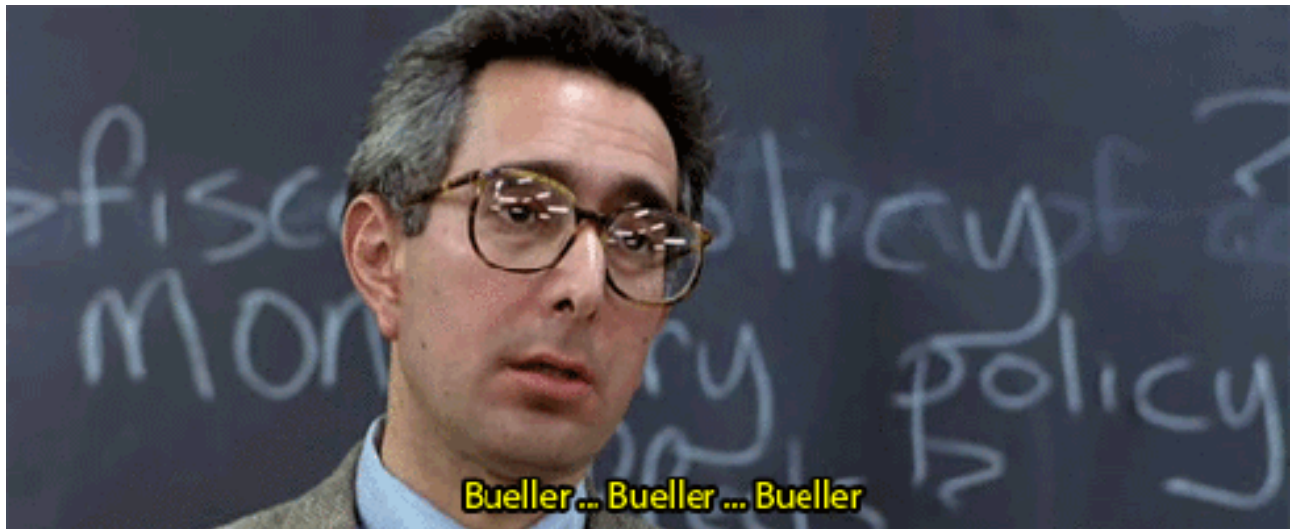
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to sign an attendance sheet is “prone to be cheated since they can sign their own names and their classmates’ names who are absent in the class; it is not a desirable task for instructors to calculate the total attendance of every student in a semester by going through every attendance sheet manually.”¹⁰³¹

There are already a number of attendance smartphone apps available for educators. The Class120 app, for example, allows both teachers and parents to monitor whether students are attending class by simply having each check-in as they arrive. Jeff Whorley, the founder and chief executive officer of Core Principle Inc., which developed the app, expects it “will be successful because it is dependent on something no person under 25 is ever without — a cellphone.”¹⁰³² He says students are “not likely to hand off their phones to check-in to a class.”¹⁰³³

Using one of the existing smartphone truancy apps rather than spending federal funds to pay to develop a new one may not “Save Ferris,” but it would save taxpayer funds.



Save Ferris: The National Science Foundation is funding a truancy app that could end the tradition of taking attendance by reading the names of each student.

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73 CALIFORNIA ZIPLINE

California
Economic Development Administration
\$1.8 MILLION

The longest zipline in California opened in September thanks to a \$1.8 million federal grant.¹⁰³⁴ The money was provided by the Economic Development Administration to the La Jolla Band of Luiseno Indians for the purpose of making improvements to the Pauma Valley Recreational Area that was damaged by flooding in 2010.¹⁰³⁵

The La Jolla Zip Zoom winds through more than a mile of the La Jolla Indian Reservation and “overlooks the San Luis Rey River with breathtaking views of Palomar Mountain and Pauma Valley.”¹⁰³⁶ It features four different courses that literally zip riders in full-body harnesses attached to a steel cable over canyons and valleys, a riverbed and thousands of treetops.¹⁰³⁷



“It was amazing, such an adrenaline rush,” says model Kristi Kruthaup, who is featured in the promotional photos for the zipline. “When you first get up there it’s kind of nerve wracking and then as soon as you go it’s awesome.”¹⁰³⁸

The tribe’s campground draws about 120,000 visitors every year and the Tribal Vice Chairman Fred Nelson says “offering an extreme adventure in a beautiful setting” will add to the area’s appeal.¹⁰³⁹

The zipline’s “success, officials say, could allow the tribe to build cabins and other lodging and eventually create a small casino.”¹⁰⁴⁰

*The La Jolla Zip Zoom—promoted as the longest zipline in California— was paid for with a \$1.8 million federal grant.*¹⁰⁴¹

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74

PAID TO DO NOTHING

Nationwide
Department of Homeland Security
\$1.8 MILLION

The mission of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is “to secure the nation from the many threats we face,” and the agency says “this requires the dedication of more than 240,000 employees in jobs that range from aviation and border security to emergency response, from cybersecurity analyst to chemical facility inspector. Our duties are wide-ranging, and our goal is clear - keeping America safe.”¹⁰⁴²

The recent terrorist attacks in Paris as well as those here on our own soil, such as the shooting at the U.S. military recruitment center in Tennessee this summer, remind us how vitally important DHS’s mission is how it requires constant vigilance by a dedicated workforce.

Most of the more than 240,000 employees at DHS do their part, but nearly 100 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) employees have been collecting a pay check for over a year to do nothing.¹⁰⁴³

DHS spent almost \$1.8 million paying the salaries of these 88 employees who have been placed on administrative leave for disciplinary purposes. Four were on paid leave for three years or more, while another 17 employees were paid to do nothing for two years or more, according to data compiled by the office of U.S. Senator Charles E. Grassley.¹⁰⁴⁴

Of the 88 paid to do nothing, 53 face misconduct charges, 13 have issues with security clearances and 22 others are being examined for “fitness for duty,” according to data DHS provided to the senator.¹⁰⁴⁵

The employees on leave for at least a year were across the department’s components, suggesting “systemic misuse of paid administrative leave,” Grassley said.¹⁰⁴⁶

This is not a problem limited to DHS. The Department of Veterans Affairs spent \$23 million paying more than 2,500 employees who were placed on paid leave for a month or longer last year. Of these, 46 employees were on administrative leave for more than a year, but the agency did not track why.¹⁰⁴⁷

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Employees on administrative leave not only collect paychecks to stay home and do nothing, but they also “build their pensions, vacation and sick days and move up the federal pay scale,” notes the *Washington Post*.¹⁰⁴⁸

Paying misbehaving federal employees to do nothing is not fair to their colleagues who have to fill-in to make sure the work is getting done or taxpayers who get billed for the cost.

75

SUSPICIOUS BAR COASTERS

Maryland
Department of Homeland Security
\$2.5 MILLION

A bar or pub without suspicious behavior would be, well, kinda suspicious.

Regardless, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is distributing drink coasters at some bars in the Washington, D.C. area, proclaiming “IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING,” urging bar patrons to report anything that may seem suspicious.¹⁰⁴⁹ Nowhere on the coaster, however, is a phone number provided to actually make a report.

An employee at a popular Irish bar in the nation’s capital notes “every now and again we have an occasional purse snatcher, patron walk out on their tab, or unruly European soccer fan.” But he says “as far as acts of terrorism inside an Irish pub, I cannot seem to recall witnessing any in my years of employment—nor anyone reading a coaster.”¹⁰⁵⁰

What was highly suspicious to the bar employee was the small print on the coaster: “Purchased with funds provided by the US Department of Homeland Security.”¹⁰⁵¹

Even more suspicious, when asked about the funding for the coasters, the department largely evaded the questions. The non-partisan Congressional Research Service said it “didn’t get direct answers” about the funding of the project.¹⁰⁵²

What was revealed is that the drink coasters are part of the “See Something, Say Something” campaign in the National Capital Region. The Maryland Transportation Administration (MTA) received \$2.5 million from the Transit Security Grant Program (TSGP) to pay for the bar coasters beginning in Fiscal Year 2012.¹⁰⁵³ The funds also paid for the purchases

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of website domain name, www.securetransit.org, and “marketing materials carrying the ‘See Something Say, Something’ campaign logo and messaging, as well as additional materials and outreach and public awareness efforts to include awareness materials.”¹⁰⁵⁴

One side of the coaster features a cartoon eyeball—with two arms and legs, wearing a detective’s hat and holding a magnifying glass—saying “KEEP YOUR GOOD EYE OPEN.” The flip side has a picture of a duffle bag and urges “report unattended bags and suspicious behavior to police and transit personnel.” No phone number or contact information other than a web link is provided to call to make a report.

A giant banner with similar graphics and messaging was spotted at the Tysons Corner shopping mall in Fairfax, Virginia this summer.¹⁰⁵⁵

TSGP’s total available funding in 2015 is \$87 million.¹⁰⁵⁶ The program, administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), is “one of the Department’s grant programs that directly support transportation infrastructure security activities.”¹⁰⁵⁷

It is difficult for anyone—even a patron in a dimly lit bar—to see how drink coasters and banners at shopping malls “directly support transportation infrastructure security activities.”



DHS’s “IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING” bar coasters did not provide a phone number to call to report suspicious behavior and are difficult to read in a dimly lit setting.

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76

ARTIFICIAL STORY TIME

Georgia
National Science Foundation
\$204,000

The droid C-3PO from *Star Wars* boasts of being fluent in over six million forms of communication but admits to not being “very good at telling stories. Well, not at making them interesting anyway.”

It turns out C-3PO’s inability to articulate a riveting tale may not be all that unusual for artificial intelligence (AI), even in the real world.



Actually, there's not much to tell. I'm not much more than an interpreter, and not very good at telling stories. Well, not at making them interesting, anyways.

“At this point, human authored interactive narrative still remains the most cost-effective means of generating an interactive narrative experience,” researchers at the Georgia Institute of Technology who studied the ability of AI to put together a plot concluded.¹⁰⁵⁸

The study to analyze the ability of AI to tell interactive fictional stories was funded as part of a \$204,000 continuing grant from the National Science Foundation.¹⁰⁵⁹

To conduct the study, a story telling system named Scheherazade IF (Interactive Fiction), “a reference to the fabled Arabic queen and storyteller,” was created.¹⁰⁶⁰

Scheherazade IF was designed to crowdsource “plots for interactive stories, which are popular in video games and let players choose different branching story options.”¹⁰⁶¹ Scheherazade IF’s story telling skills were then tested with two interactive plotlines, one involving a bank robbery and another about a date to

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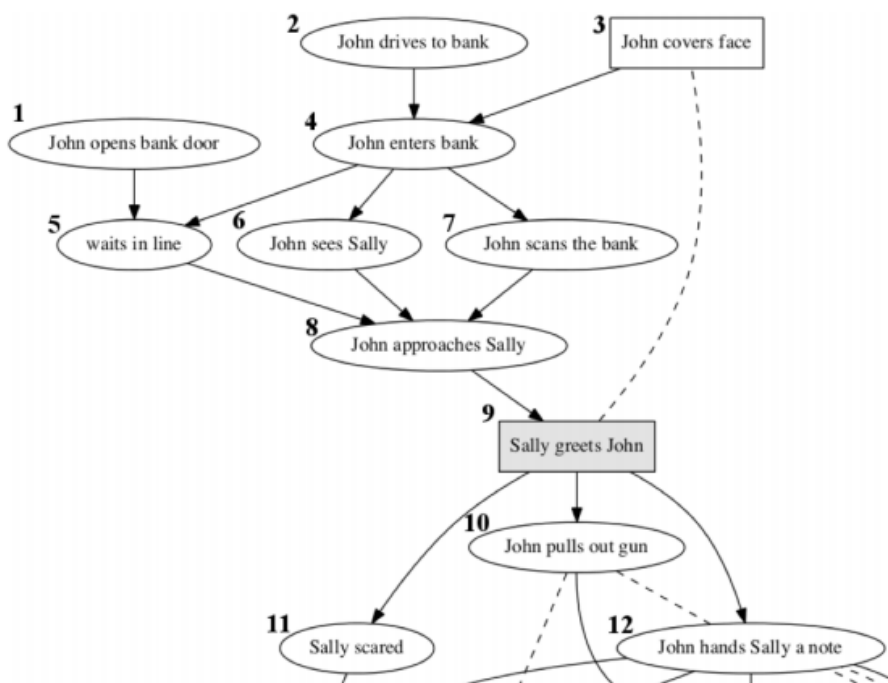
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the movies. John buying popcorn and putting his arm around his date, Sally, in the theater were among the twists and turns on the AI's movie narrative¹⁰⁶² (not quite the tales of intergalactic rebellion against an evil empire C-3PO demurred he could not make interesting).

The researchers concede "the AI plays it safe with the crowdsourced content, producing what one might expect in different genres."¹⁰⁶³

The storytelling system is also susceptible to plot errors. "An example of an error stemming from the system's lack of commonsense knowledge would be the ability to open the bank door after already having entered the bank," note the researchers.¹⁰⁶⁴

"The impact of this research can support not only online storytelling for entertainment, but also digital storytelling," according to the researchers.¹⁰⁶⁵ "Using the Georgia Tech approach, one might imagine a *Star Wars* game using online fan fiction to let the AI system generate countless paths for a player to take," according to a news release announcing the researchers' findings and their potential impact.¹⁰⁶⁶



This may sound like delusions of grandeur to *Star Wars* fans and other games since the researchers themselves concede "the current Scheherazade-IF system does not allow for particularly unusual experiences."¹⁰⁶⁷

While artificial intelligence can be programmed for storytelling, researchers have concluded "human authored interactive narrative still remains the most cost-effective means of generating an interactive narrative experience."¹⁰⁶⁸

This graph outlines the plot of a story about a bank robbery developed by a story telling system with artificial intelligence.¹⁰⁶⁹

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THE FARCE AWAKENS

77 THE WORLD AT 7 O'CLOCK

California
National Science Foundation
\$455,000

What were you doing at 7 o'clock last night?

It seems we were all doing similar things.

That is what researchers at the University of California, Riverside concluded after surveying nearly 5,550 people from 20 countries. The study "The World at 7: Comparing the Experience of Situations Across 20 Countries," revealed "people's experiences at 7 the previous night tended to be very similar, no matter where they lived."¹⁰⁷⁰

"The typical situation was described as largely pleasant."¹⁰⁷¹ The lowest-ranked statement was that "someone was being abused or victimized."¹⁰⁷²

The previous evening's situations were most similar in the United States and Canada and most different in South Korea and Denmark.¹⁰⁷³

The results were tallied from an online survey that asked the participants "to describe the 7 p.m. scene using a series of 89 statements, which included phrases like: rational thinking is called for, situation raises issues of power, or potential romantic partners are present."¹⁰⁷⁴

"In every country, people most commonly described the previous night as being an uncomplicated, or a positive social event," says professor David Funder, who led the study.¹⁰⁷⁵

"The overall organization of the data collection" of the study was supported in part by a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF).¹⁰⁷⁶ The federal agency is providing an additional \$454,866 to conduct a follow-up study over the next three years. Parts of the world not included in the original study, like Africa and South America, will be surveyed and the questions will "include broader measures of personality and behavior."¹⁰⁷⁷ Psychologists in 39 countries have been recruited to be part of the follow-up study.

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Professor Funder says “generally speaking, there’s a surprising degree of uniformity in human experiences, in everyday life across the globe.”¹⁰⁷⁸ Which likely means in three years when the results of the ongoing NSF study are reported we can look forward to a lot more of the same old situation at 7.

The study’s set-up and conclusions, however, are not without critics.

A *Discover* magazine critique notes the study participants “were not selected at random: all of them were students or ‘members of college communities’”. What’s more, all of the participating nations were politically stable and at least middle-income. Is life so generally happy in Iraq, South Sudan, or Haiti? Most likely, none of the participants in this study were acutely threatened by war, poverty, or disease, which makes them unrepresentative of humanity in general.”¹⁰⁷⁹ *Discover* also points out that while the study found “around the world, people’s #1 description of the situation at 7 pm was ‘Situation is basically simple and clear-cut,’” this description “doesn’t mean that every individual person had the same experience every evening.”¹⁰⁸⁰

Taxpayers are likely to have a similar reaction to spending nearly half-a-million dollars on this study no matter what time they are asked.



Were we all really doing the same thing last night at 7 p.m.?

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THE FARCE AWAKENS

78

MAPLE MADNESS

Ohio
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$20,000

March is maple month in Ohio.

This year to celebrate, the state tapped the federal government to pay for a “Maple Madness Driving Tour.”

With funding from the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, the Ohio Maple Producers Association (OMPA) put on the month long self-driving tour to celebrate everything maple.¹⁰⁸¹ “The goal” of the Maple Madness Driving Trail “is to have visitors drive no more than one hour across Ohio to reach a working sugarhouse.”¹⁰⁸²

The 2015 Maple Madness Driving Tour featured 45 stops in 22 counties.¹⁰⁸³ “Some stops are small, backyard ventures, while others are large, commercial operations.”¹⁰⁸⁴

“To date, \$19,958.31 has been expended on this project,” according to a representative from the state of Ohio.¹⁰⁸⁵ “Recipients were allowed to begin work on their projects in October (2014). Since Ohio maple syrup production is in the winter months, expenditures for the project began in early 2015.”¹⁰⁸⁶ The work for the Maple Tour “is completed in March at the conclusion of the tour but work for the following year then starts.”¹⁰⁸⁷

“Ohio’s demand for maple products is currently greater than the state’s production,” according to the Ohio Maple Producers Association—which underscores that federal funding for the Maple Madness Tour was not necessary to increase the market for maple producers.¹⁰⁸⁸

The OMPA encouraged not just producers, but anyone willing to sell maple products or even put up maple displays, to participate in what it called “the biggest and best maple tour in the United States.”¹⁰⁸⁹

“You do not even have to be making syrup, just be willing to open your sugarhouse and welcome visitors and sell them your maple syrup. You don’t even need a sugarhouse, maybe a garage set up with products to sell and maple displays and information will do the trick.”¹⁰⁹⁰

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The stops included Pancake Town USA in Burton and the Sugar Camp in Burton.¹⁰⁹¹

Bissell Maple Farm, located in Rock Creek, Ohio, boasted being “the largest and most-visited stop” on the tour.¹⁰⁹² Visitors were treated to horse-drawn wagon rides, views of acres of maple trees tapped for sap, guided tours of the sugar house, and a free pancake breakfast featuring Bissell Maple Farm’s own maple syrup.¹⁰⁹³

This wasn’t the only maple flavored project USDA paid for this past year. Tennessee, Maine, Michigan, Ohio, and Virginia also spent federal funds to market maple products.¹⁰⁹⁴

The Commercial Maple Syrup Producers of Michigan, for example, received \$49,000 from USDA’s Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.¹⁰⁹⁵ The money is being spent to take better advantage of “*untapped* resources” (emphasis added) for “outreach, education, and market development activities” both in the U.S. and internationally.¹⁰⁹⁶ The group “focused” their federally funded efforts “this year on Michigan Maple Syrup Weekend,” where syrup producers “opened up their farms so visitors could see how maple syrup is made.”¹⁰⁹⁷ Michigan’s Maple Syrup Weekend was actually three different weekends, with events held in different regions throughout the month.¹⁰⁹⁸

This sappy spending may be sweet for maple producers but it leaves a bad taste that sticks in the mouths of taxpayers.



A horse-drawn wagon was part of the fun of Ohio’s Maple Madness Tour which was supported with funds from the USDA.

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79

HYPER DOGS

North Carolina
National Science Foundation
\$10 MILLION

Professionally trained assistance dogs remained calmer under pressure than excitable pet dogs with little training, a study funded by three federal agencies has found.¹⁰⁹⁹

Hyper pet dogs were matched against assistance dogs that are “bred and trained for low arousal” in a series of low- and high-arousal trials that challenged the dogs to retrieve a jerky treat.¹¹⁰⁰

The dog’s temperament was measured by the pace the pooches wagged their tails, calculated in wags per minute.¹¹⁰¹

The dogs were timed on how long it took for each to retrieve a treat held by a person behind a see-through plastic show curtain.¹¹⁰² To get to the treat, the dogs had to walk around the barrier.¹¹⁰³ Each dog was walked around the barrier prior to the trials so it knew how to successfully complete the task.

In the low-arousal trials, the dogs were called by name in a “low, monotone voice.”¹¹⁰⁴

In the high-arousal trials, the dog were called in a “high-pitched, excited voice” while the treat was “enthusiastically” waved back and forth.”¹¹⁰⁵

For the calm dogs, “increasing the level of excitement and urgency boosted their ability to stay on task and get the treat.



Chill dogs perform better under pressure than hyper dogs, according to findings of a study funded by three different government agencies.

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But for excitable dogs the pattern was reversed. Increasing the level of stimulation only made them take longer. ¹¹⁰⁶

“The service dogs were generally more cool in the face of stress or distraction, whereas the pet dogs tended to be more excitable and high-strung,” noted one of the researchers. ¹¹⁰⁷ “Adding more excitement pushed the pet dogs over the edge and impaired their ability to perform at their peak.” ¹¹⁰⁸

During her high-arousal trial, “a two-year-old spaniel named Charlie Brown lost it and shut down, barking and zipping around crazily until she almost ran out of time.” The researcher noted “in the first five trials she did fine and solved the puzzle quickly with no problems. Then when the high-arousal trials started she choked. She just couldn’t figure it out.” ¹¹⁰⁹

The researchers conclude that mellow dogs have “an edge” in high stress situations while hyper dogs “crack under pressure.” ¹¹¹⁰ Similar patterns have been demonstrated in chickens, cats and humans by previous studies. ¹¹¹¹

Seventy-six trained assistance dogs and 30 pet dogs, including an eight-month-old Jack Russell terrier named Enzo, a six-year-old mixed Pointer/Dane named Bugsy, and an 11-year-old Vizsla named Sienna, participated in the study. ¹¹¹²



LAB REPORT: Dogs were timed using a stopwatch to see how long it took them to walk around a shower curtain to retrieve a jerky treat.

The study fetched grants from the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Office of Naval Research (ONR), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). ¹¹¹³ The NSF funding comes out of a \$9.2 million graduate research fellowship program. ¹¹¹⁴ The ONR support is part of a \$2.4 million grant to Duke University. ¹¹¹⁵ NIH’s contribution is part of a \$72,900 grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. ¹¹¹⁶

Compared to the higher priority research these agencies should be focused on, this study is a classic example of the tail wagging the dog.

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80 COSMETOLOGY SCHOOL

Nevada
Economic Development Administration
\$1.25 MILLION

Get a haircut and get a real job.

That's the objective of a \$1.25 million federal grant paying for "the construction and acquisition of equipment for a cosmetology and barber training facility" at the Expertise Cosmetology Institute in Las Vegas, Nevada.¹¹¹⁷

"This project will create more than 550 jobs," promises the Economic Development Administration (EDA), which awarded the money to the Expertise Cosmetology Institute.¹¹¹⁸

"It will truly help transform the economy of the region," promises U.S. Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, who boasts "I worked so closely with the EDA to obtain this vital investment."¹¹¹⁹

While cosmetology does offer career opportunities for many, the need for this particular grant is questionable and these promises seem rather lofty since the area already has 17 cosmetology schools, including Expertise and the Paul Mitchell academy.¹¹²⁰



\$1.25 million grant for a Las Vegas beauty school demonstrates federal spending needs a haircut.

With the grant, an 11,000 square foot vocational training facility is being constructed to "train the workforce to prepare them for employment opportunities in the stable cosmetology industry, which is largely entrepreneurial in nature, with wages significantly higher than the minimum wage," according to EDA.¹¹²¹

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The Expertise Cosmetology Institute program includes coursework in blow drying, shampooing, and, of course, cutting hair.¹¹²² The real hot air being around blown here, however, is not from a hair dryer, but from the politicians and bureaucrats making the grand predictions spending this money will have.

The grant demonstrates that federal spending is long overdue for a trim.

81

BIG PAY FOR LITTLE WORK

Washington D.C.
Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad
\$140,000

A tiny independent agency created to protect the heritage of victims of the Holocaust and Communism has morphed into a taxpayer-subsidized lobbying firm for a foreign agent.

The mission of the Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad (CPAHA) is to identify and preserve "cemeteries, monuments, and historic buildings in Eastern and Central Europe that are associated with the heritage of U.S. citizens."¹¹²³ It was created because the Holocaust and 45 years of atheistic, Communist governments wiped out most of Europe's Jewish population, leaving no one to care for cemeteries and other sacred communal properties.¹¹²⁴

CPAHA has a \$644,000 annual budget.¹¹²⁵ Its only full time staff person has been on paid administrative leave for several years and the executive director, Jeffrey Farrow, is technically a part-time government contractor.¹¹²⁶ He is also a registered lobbyist and foreign agent employed by his family's firm The Oliver Group, Inc.¹¹²⁷

"The Commission appears to have paid Jeffrey Farrow, its executive director, \$143,000 a year for four to eight hours of work a week—between \$344 and \$688 an hour," according to the findings of an investigation by the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (HSGAC).¹¹²⁸

"In this city with a grand tradition of government officials who pass through the revolving door into a world of big paychecks, Jeffrey Farrow stands apart," the *New York Times* marveled. "Mr. Farrow was at once a federal government bureaucrat and lobbyist. The revolving door did not even have to spin."¹¹²⁹ The *Washington Post* called Farrow's setup "a

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plum arrangement: Work for the commission one day a week and bill the government for his time to the tune of more than \$100,000 a year.”¹¹³⁰

When questioned about the generous compensation the commission was paying to a lobbyist for relatively few hours of work, the Chairwoman of the Commission, Lesley Weiss, blamed a lack of federal funding for the unusual arrangement.

“The Commission has historically grappled with financial and logistical limitations that have made it difficult for our very small, unique agency to function in a manner consistent with a normal federal agency,” Weiss wrote to HSGAC Chairman Ron Johnson.¹¹³¹ She said the commission has “sought authority and funding” to hire more staff for many years.¹¹³² Furthermore, despite his title as Executive Director of the Commission, Farrow is regarded as a “part-time contractor” and the fees paid for his service “cannot be considered to be a salary.”¹¹³³ She further notes “there is no federal law or regulation that would preclude Mr. Farrow from serving as an independent contractor to the commission while also maintaining registration as a lobbyist.”¹¹³⁴

Farrow’s lobbying includes advocating a financial bailout for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and federal aid to the Republic of Palau.¹¹³⁵ And while Farrow’s government paid job is to preserve the heritage of victims of atrocities, at his lobbying firm he hired the son-in-law of a brutal Guatemala dictator, Efraín Ríos Montt, who was convicted of genocide and other crimes against humanity committed during his reign.¹¹³⁶

All of which has raised questions with congressional investigators and the media that have been largely dismissed or ignored.

The CPAHA’s project manager, Katarina Ryan, made a complaint to the Office of Special Counsel (OSC) in 2012.¹¹³⁷ Ryan alleged “approximately 90% of Farrow’s weekly time is devoted to his lobbying practice, which he conducts from the Commission’s office, using government resources such as printers, fax machines, and supplies.”¹¹³⁸

The U.S. General Services Administration Office of Inspector General found government property had been used for personal business by the chairman of the commission but “there was insufficient evidence to show any violation by Mr. Farrow.”¹¹³⁹

The whistleblower, Ms. Ryan, was placed on paid administrative leave where she has remained for several years.¹¹⁴⁰ The OSC case into Farrow’s activities is still open.¹¹⁴¹

“Farrow, as a result of his different jobs, was often working with the State Department and members of Congress in his official capacity — as the agency urged foreign

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governments to preserve cemeteries and other historic sites — while he was also making appeals to these same officials on behalf of his lobbying clients,” the *New York Times* points out.¹¹⁴²

“While being paid by the federal government, he was directly lobbying Secretary of State Clinton to intervene on issues related to Palau,” notes the *Washington Post*.¹¹⁴³

Farrow lobbied then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to increase U.S. assistance to Palau.¹¹⁴⁴ In one message to Farrow, Secretary Clinton wrote “I hope the Palau Compact can be resolved soon because I doubt we will have the funds to do it next year w the budget and the potential setbacks in the mid-terms. PLS try to work w everyone to finalize. And, give my warmest ‘Hola’ to my friends in PR.”¹¹⁴⁵

So while scoring a big win for Palau, what about the work of the commission? The CPAHA website is “heavy with accounts of restorations and memorials completed in the 2000s, but lists only a few projects this decade,” notes the *Jewish Week*.¹¹⁴⁶ “Information about 20 recent projects, many not appearing on the website” was also provided to the newspaper by an agency official.¹¹⁴⁷

“This relatively tiny agency is a classic example of the dysfunction and waste that typify far too much of the federal government,” says Senator Johnson. “Established with the best of intentions to memorialize the horrors of 20th-century genocides,” the Commission is being “used to enrich a lobbyist.”¹¹⁴⁸

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82 YOGURTOPIA

Michigan

Department of Housing and Urban Development

\$77,000

A vacant building in Brighton, Michigan is being transformed “into a full-use yogurt store with complete interior remodeling, a new façade and sitting area at the rear of the building” with funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).¹¹⁴⁹

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation allocated \$76,886 in HUD Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for the Yogurtopia Building Façade project this year.¹¹⁵⁰

Yogurtopia offers a variety of more than 50 flavors of yogurt including Cake Batter, Cotton Candy, Snickerdoodle, Toasted Marshmallow, Red Velvet Cake, and Strawberry Shortcake.¹¹⁵¹ The store also sells gourmet coffee drinks, crepes, and baked goods.¹¹⁵²

“This business fits in with the sort of summer fun theme we have in our town,” explains Matt Modrack, executive director of the Brighton Downtown Development Authority, adding the federal grant “means a lot” for the city.¹¹⁵³



More than 50 flavors of yogurt are on the menu of Yogurtopia, which was remodeled with a \$77,000 federal grant.

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83 WAVE STREETCAR

Florida
Department of Transportation
\$1.25 MILLION

A streetcar project in Fort Lauderdale, Florida is running behind schedule, over budget, and along a similar route as an existing trolley that is underused.

The WAVE is a 2.8 mile streetcar system planned for downtown Fort Lauderdale.¹¹⁵⁴ It will cost nearly \$50 million per mile to complete.¹¹⁵⁵

The \$142.6 million project is a year behind schedule and has incurred \$13.9 million in cost overruns.¹¹⁵⁶ The streetcars were expected to be running in 2016 but now will not be in operation until late 2017 at the earliest.¹¹⁵⁷

This year alone, Fort Lauderdale received \$1.25 million from the Department of Transportation's pilot program for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) for the continued planning of the WAVE Streetcar.¹¹⁵⁸

Federal funding for the project began in 2008 with a \$670,000 pork project earmarked requested by a bipartisan group of Florida's congressional delegation.¹¹⁵⁹ The earmark was funded again in 2009¹¹⁶⁰ and 2010.¹¹⁶¹ Despite the ban on congressional earmarks enacted in 2011, the WAVE continued receiving federal funds, including an \$18 million Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant¹¹⁶² in 2012. In total, the project has picked up over \$71 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation.¹¹⁶³ The South Florida Regional Transportation Authority (SFRTA) has requested \$9.5 million in additional federal funds.¹¹⁶⁴

The project has had a bumpy ride and the future of the WAVE is wavering.

SFRTA officials warn the streetcars are "in jeopardy of losing federal and ultimately SFRTA support" due to a number of unresolved issues including unmet funding commitments.¹¹⁶⁵ In June 2014, for example, Fort Lauderdale breached a partnership agreement by missing a deadline to produce \$7.3 million.¹¹⁶⁶

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A loss of any funding at this point would derail the streetcar, perhaps for good.

The \$142 million budgeted for the WAVE's startup costs, which include embedding rail line, buying five streetcars, and building 10 passenger stations, is "just the beginning."¹¹⁶⁷ The annual operating and maintenance expenses are expected to total \$2.6 million a year, far more than the expected revenues. Passenger tickets, which will cost just \$1 for a one-way fare, and advertising space are projected to bring in just \$1.1 million a year.¹¹⁶⁸ Therefore "a stream— or perhaps a flood— of operating subsidies" will be necessary to keep the WAVE running.¹¹⁶⁹

SFRTA executive director Jack Stephens says "the project can still be done without the extra money, but the plans would have to be scaled back."¹¹⁷⁰



Taxpayers can wave goodbye to \$71 million spent on the WAVE streetcar in Fort Lauderdale that is running behind schedule and over budget.

The WAVE is an unnecessary extravagance since the city's trolley runs along a similar route as the proposed streetcar and buses are more efficient and cost less.¹¹⁷¹ "The Sun Trolley is not carrying enough people to make it OK to build a streetcar. If it was running full seven days a week, but the Sun Trolley runs empty 60 percent of time," adds one Fort Lauderdale resident.¹¹⁷² It would cost \$122 an hour to operate each of the WAVE streetcar as compared to \$95 an hour for a bus, according to an assessment by engineering firm Parsons Brinckerhoff.¹¹⁷³

With the streetcar unlikely to be operational anytime soon, taxpayers can wave goodbye to tens of millions of dollars as they are the only ones being taken for a ride by the WAVE.

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84 THE LIBRARY OF THINGS

California
The Institute of Museum and Library Services
\$55,000

With the increased use of e-books, fewer and fewer people are visiting libraries to borrow books.¹¹⁷⁴ So is it time to clear the dusty books off the shelves of libraries and replace them with badminton rackets, games, sewing machines and other random things?

While not doing exactly that, the Sacramento Public Library in California is spending a federal grant to establish “The Library of Things” to loan out items other than books, such as sewing machines, board games, video games, musical instruments, laminators, and GoPro cameras.¹¹⁷⁵

“These items and more were chosen in a voting process by Sacramento Public Library patrons and funded by a Library Services and Technology Act grant,” according to the library.¹¹⁷⁶ The total amount of the federal grant to support the Library of Things is \$55,000.¹¹⁷⁷

The inventory of things “is completely made up of patron suggestions.”¹¹⁷⁸ Anyone can submit a suggestion or vote on the other items suggested by others on the library’s [website](#).¹¹⁷⁹ “The most popular objects will then be purchased and added to the library.”¹¹⁸⁰

“So far, the two most popular ideas, tied at 150 votes each, have been a sewing machine and video games.”¹¹⁸¹ The library bought six sewing machines as a result.¹¹⁸²

The public has suggested everything from a drone¹¹⁸³ to motion-action wildlife cameras, a turkey fryer, a Nespresso machine,¹¹⁸⁴ button makers, a silk screening kit, a portable DVD player, gardening tools, and a power drill.¹¹⁸⁵

Most of these items do not seem to meet the goals of promoting literacy, education, and learning “for the purpose of cultivating an educated and informed citizenry, which are among the listed purposes for grants administered by the Library Services and Technology Act.”¹¹⁸⁶

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"It's rare that a government agency with a very clear mandate – books – gets the chance to experiment with something like this," admitted Lori Easterwood, the manager of the Library of Things project.¹¹⁸⁷

Despite the expansion beyond books, the director admits the library's literary collection— especially for children— is outdated. "Our children's books are old; they're out of date," said Rivkah Sass, Sacramento Public Library Director.¹¹⁸⁸

The library is not in dire need of funding since a tax hike approved by voters last year will collect \$1.9 million in additional funding for the city's libraries as of January 2015. This tax will increase every year over the next 12 years.¹¹⁸⁹

While some Sacramento residents may take advantage of the option to borrow a sewing machine or video game from the Library of Things, the funding for the project is being made possible by the world's biggest borrower—the U.S. federal government.



Help us create the "Library of Things"

Sacramento Public Library is launching a "Library of Things" – a collection of items that can be checked out or used in the library: from tools to badminton rackets to 3D scanners.

The "Library of Things" will be housed at the [Arcade Library](#). The first round of voting will focus on technology—from Sept. 14- Nov. 14, submit your technology related ideas and vote for which items you'd like us to provide. The items that get the most votes, and the Library can feasibly provide (the total budget is \$4,500 for technology amongst other concerns), will be purchased for use by the community.

Have fun!

I want to see...

free money from the federal government



This project is supported by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services, under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian.

The Library of Things, financed with a federal grant, allows patrons to decide what items they want to be available for borrowing.

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85 SOLAR POWERED BEER

Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, Ohio, Wyoming
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$210,000

Taxpayers are due a thank you card from a New Hampshire greeting card company for the \$29,000 grant it received from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to cover the costs of its electric bills. USDA is also helping defray the energy costs of breweries and a golf course.

Tree-Free Greetings is spending the money from USDA to install a solar system that will generate enough power to provide for the company's energy use.¹¹⁹⁰ Tree-Free's is seeking to be "the most environmentally friendly greeting card company."¹¹⁹¹ While Tree-Free cards are "printed on 100 percent post consumer recycled paper,"¹¹⁹² the dollar bills the company is taking from the taxpayers are not.

Also in New Hampshire, the Community Golf Corp scored a \$41,000 grant to install a roof-top solar panel.¹¹⁹³ Taxpayers are likely to be teed off paying the electric bills for a golf course with annual club membership dues starting at \$1,750.¹¹⁹⁴

The Throwback Brewery LLC was served up a \$40,000 grant to "install a solar system tied to the grid, providing revenue" to the business.¹¹⁹⁵ "Just as more and more people increasingly want to know where their food comes from, we believe that people will also want to know where their beer comes from," the Brewery states on its website.¹¹⁹⁶ Likewise, it is important to know where the money being spent on projects like this is coming from and who is paying the costs for the good intentions of others.



Taxpayers are due a thank you card for picking up the electricity costs of producing Tree-Free Greetings Cards.

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Other breweries are also benefitting from USDA supplied energy.

Jackie O's Pub & Brewery of Athens, Ohio, offers a selection of 38 different beers,¹¹⁹⁷ and soon it will have solar powered beer on tap—with taxpayers picking up the tab. USDA poured \$44,119 into the brewery to cover a portion of the total \$176,500 cost for installing 298 solar panels on the roof of the brewery.¹¹⁹⁸ The sudsy subsidy for Jackie O's was one of 53 projects in Ohio to receive grants from the Rural Energy for America Program out of about 120 applicants, according to a business program specialist for the USDA's Columbus office.¹¹⁹⁹ The Ohio Rural Development State Director Tony Logan said "the decision to give the grant to Jackie O's made a lot of sense" and "announcing this project at Jackie O's during Brew Week was the perfect culmination of the project."¹²⁰⁰

In Montana, Bitter Root Brewing paid to install solar arrays on its roof with the assistance of an \$8,670 grant from the USDA's Renewable Energy for America program.¹²⁰¹ Jason Goeltz, general manager of Bitter Root Brewing, says "it has saved our business money, affording us an opportunity to take those savings and invest them in to other areas," such as equipment purchases.¹²⁰²



Short's Brewery in Elk Rapids, Michigan received USDA grant of more than \$35,000 to help it install solar panels.¹²⁰³

The Snake River Brewing Company in Wyoming received a \$13,810 USDA REAP grant to install a solar panel.¹²⁰⁴

The federal assistance provided by these USDA grants duplicates an existing federal tax credit "equal to 30 percent of expenditures, with no maximum credit," for equipment to produce solar power.¹²⁰⁵

Maine Beer Co., for example, recently installed over 200 solar panels at a cost over \$200,000, 55 percent of which was offset by the combination of a federal tax credit and a USDA grant. "You have to pay for electricity one way or the other," say company co-founder David Kleban.¹²⁰⁶

Sudsy subsidy: Its happy hour all day long—as long as the sun is out—at Jackie O's Pub & Brewery and other breweries where Uncle Sam is picking up the tab for installing solar panels to power the beer making.

Similarly, Kickapoo Coffee Roasters in Viroqua, Wisconsin, received a USDA REAP grant for 25 percent of the cost of installing solar panels and will "also take advantage of the 30 percent federal tax credit available for renewable

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systems.”¹²⁰⁷ The price for the installation of 80 solar panels was \$75,000, but after two grants and a federal tax credit was calculated in, the total cost to the company was less than \$30,000.¹²⁰⁸

While solar power has many benefits, taxpayers should not be forced to subsidize—sometimes twice—the cost of private companies’ energy bills.

86

BURIED CEMETERY GRANT

Guam
National Cemetery Association
\$3.2 MILLION

No information can be found to explain exactly how Guam’s Office of Veteran’s Affairs (VAO) spent much of a \$3.2 million grant intended to renovate a veteran’s cemetery and burglars being blamed for stealing the records.

A Guam veterans organization is urging the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General to investigate the mishandling of this grant and other questionable practices by Guam’s VAO.¹²⁰⁹

How was the \$3.2 million grant spent? Who was given the money? What it was spent on? Where was it spent? Was the intended work completed?

The documentation to fully answer those questions cannot be found, according to Public Auditor Doris Flores Brooks.¹²¹⁰

“This grant was not recorded on the books of the government of Guam, it was only handled in the checking account that the Veterans Affairs Office handles,” said Brooks. “Your bid proposal, who did you select, why did you select, each time you make a payment, all the necessary documentation that is followed in the administration of any kind of capital grant was not available. Was completely unavailable to the auditors,” said Brooks.¹²¹¹ She notes “this became a questioned cost of \$3.2 million meaning no documentation to support the amount.”¹²¹²

“The local VA office administered the grant on its own and didn’t communicate with the Department of Administration or with the Guam State Clearinghouse,” which oversees federal

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grants, and provided no documentation for purchase orders, contracts, vendor invoices or reports to substantiate costs according to an audit by the Office of Public Accountability.¹²¹³ The Guam VAO “most likely received money into their own checking account and then wrote checks to the contractors themselves,” Brooks believes.¹²¹⁴

“When an agency has its own checking account and is not monitored regularly it’s kind of like giving matches to a child in a sense that they don’t know how to use it and they don’t have the proper protocols in place,” said Brooks.¹²¹⁵ But, the Guam VAO has no record of any of the checks.¹²¹⁶

“The documents were lost during a burglary of the office,” former VAO Administrator John Unpingco, who oversaw the grant process, claimed in October.¹²¹⁷ He said the files were “ransacked” when burglars “went through the office trying to find something and documents filed for the grant were lost or destroyed in the mess.”¹²¹⁸

In January, however, when the burglary was reported to the police, Unpingco said “the only document missing was a former employee’s time sheet.”¹²¹⁹ Also, “between \$2,500 and \$3,000 worth of computer equipment and gardening tools, such as a computer, iPad, bushcutters and a leaf blower, were taken.”¹²²⁰ Unpingco presumes the burglars “knew what to look for, adding that the gardening tools, which were purchased just the week before, were stored in a secured room of the office.”¹²²¹



No documents can be found to show how \$3.2 million provided to renovate a veteran's cemetery were spent and burglars are being blamed for stealing the grant records.

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“I can’t replace what is missing,” Unpingco shrugged.¹²²² “We did an outstanding job” with the cemetery, he claims, “so there shouldn’t be a concern about having to repay the grant.”¹²²³

But the public auditor says the discrepancies with the “grant was not only affecting this particular grant but the overall integrity of all the other grants, so the question becomes how many other grants out there are like that?,” Brooks noted.¹²²⁴ She said “someone probably should” get in trouble, but says “it would be up to the federal grantor to decide whether or not to pursue action.”¹²²⁵

Some documents related to the project were uncovered at *Guam’s* Department of *Public Works* building permit’s section in October indicating a \$2.7 million contract was awarded to the Asanuma Corporation.¹²²⁶ The contract does not specify the scope of work other than expansion and improvement work on the cemetery. The contract was signed by Guam Governor Eddie Calvo, the Attorney General of Guam, and VAO Administrator Unpingco. No records have turned up for the remainder of the \$3.2 million grant.¹²²⁷

The money’s quiet disappearance contrasts to the fanfare made announcing that the money had been awarded for the project two years ago. “The U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs personally informed the administration of the approval of a \$3.2 million grant to develop about 2,000 gravesites on two acres that will be the final resting place for Guam’s heroes,” the governor of the U.S. territory announced in September 2013.¹²²⁸ Thousands of other gravesites were to have headstones cleaned and landscaped. The cost of the project was to be “100-percent federally funded,” according to the governor’s office.¹²²⁹

The grant was provided by the National Cemetery Association and was intended to renovate the Veteran’s Cemetery in the village of Piti, located on the western shore of the U.S. territory.¹²³⁰

A year ago, Cyndi Gogo, administrative assistant for the Office of Veterans Affairs, said two contractors worked on the renovation project.¹²³¹

Guam Governor Eddie Calvo said “I don’t want unresolved questioned costs on my watch,” assuring taxpayers “we’re getting to the bottom of this.”¹²³²

Meanwhile, the administrator of Guam VAO says he’s already working to get another federal grant to fund upgrades at the cemetery.¹²³³

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87

GOAT TRUFFLES

Vermont
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$124,000

Big Picture Farm's goat milk truffles have only been available at farmers markets or via retail order.¹²³⁴ But now the chocolate candies will be coming to store shelves thanks to a \$124,280 Value Added Producer Grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The federal money is being spent for processing, packaging and promotion of the truffles.¹²³⁵

The candies are made with vanilla flavored goat milk caramels "dipped by hand in organic dark chocolate" and "sprinkled with a touch of sea salt."¹²³⁶ A box of 8 sells for \$18.¹²³⁷

Taxpayers previously picked up the cost of the solar panels providing the energy to produce Big Picture Farm's gourmet goat milk caramels and are now paying again to make the company's new truffles.



Big Picture Farm, which is located in Townshend, Vermont, has collected two previous grants from USDA totaling \$60,000.¹²³⁸ The business, which produces "gourmet caramels" from goat milk, received about \$14,000 to install solar panels in 2013. The solar array provides "over 50 percent of our dairy and confectionary's energy needs," said Big Picture Farm co-owner Lucas Conrad.¹²³⁹

"It's exciting to see that happening but also seeing the government starting to recognize and support that effort. I think it's really important that the government does that," says Big Picture co-owner Lucas Farrell.¹²⁴⁰

While it may be exciting to receive free money, its *baaaaaaaaaaaaaad* spending like this that really gets taxpayers' goat.

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88 **UNUSED SPARE VEHICLES**

Nationwide
Department of Homeland Security
\$2.5 MILLION

The Federal Protective Service (FPS) has over 100 more law enforcement vehicles than law enforcement personnel and each extra car costs taxpayers \$9,500 a year to lease.¹²⁴¹

In all, the agency is wasting more than \$1 million a year on unnecessary vehicles and could save even more with better management of its fleet.

FPS is the security and law enforcement division of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Each of its law enforcement officers is provided an emergency response vehicle, which tend to be sport utility vehicles (SUVs). FPS also leases spare vehicles as back-ups.¹²⁴²

In total, there are 1,169 vehicles in the FPS fleet, including SUVs, sedans, pickup trucks, and vans for law enforcement and “administrative functions,” which costs \$10.7 million annually to maintain.¹²⁴³ FPS pays the General Service Administration (GSA) about \$9,500 annually for each law enforcement vehicle and \$3,500 for administrative vehicle.¹²⁴⁴

Better management of the FPS vehicle fleet could save more than \$2.5 million, according to a review by the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG).¹²⁴⁵

FPS “has not justified leasing vehicles larger than necessary to support its mission,” says the OIG, noting 93 percent of the vehicles in the fleet are SUVs.¹²⁴⁶

FPS also could not justify the large number of spare vehicles leased for administrative use, excessive Home-to-Work miles driven with official vehicles, and overpaying for equipment.¹²⁴⁷ In just one region, DHS could not justify 1.2 million Home-to-Work miles on the vehicles as being



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“essential to carrying out its missions.” This total represented 57 percent of the fleet’s overall mileage in the region.¹²⁴⁸

DHS concurred with all of the OIG recommendations to improve management of the FPS fleet and save millions of dollars.¹²⁴⁹

The Federal Protective Service spends more than \$1 million annually for unnecessary spare vehicles.



While Washington politicians and bureaucrats are often myopic to government waste right in front of their eyes, taxpayers know it when they see it.

For example, it’s perfectly clear that it was not necessary for Waltham, Massachusetts to spend \$5,000 spent to improve the image of a local optometrist’s storefront.¹²⁵⁰

Federal funds and “design assistance” are being offered to the optometrist and other business and property owners in the town as part of the Downtown Waltham Partnership’s Storefront Improvement Program. The initiative has been provided \$50,000 of federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) by the city’s planning department.¹²⁵¹ In total the city received about \$1 million in CDBG funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2015.¹²⁵²

It is hard to see how the optometrist qualified for the federal assistance since “recipients and/or their employees must meet low-moderate income guidelines.”¹²⁵³ What is clear is that the \$5,000 spent to renovate the storefront of this eye doctor’s office could have been much better spent helping to defray the cost of glasses and eye exams for truly lower income residents in need.

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Other businesses receiving storefront facelifts as part of the project include Bistro 781, Raj Collections, and The Evolving Closet.¹²⁵⁴ “Grants of up to \$5,000 will be given to eligible business or property owners for storefront improvements, such as signs, awnings, painting and lighting,” according to the Downtown Waltham Partnership, which notes businesses applying “must meet federal income eligibility requirements.”¹²⁵⁵

The old store front was no eye sore, but now thanks to federal funds and a sign with larger letters, you don’t need 20/20 vision to read the name of Paris Eyecare or to clearly see how your tax dollars have been wasted.



Can you see the \$5,000 difference? Paris Eyecare before and after receiving \$5,000 of taxpayer funds to improve the appearance of its store front.¹²⁵⁶

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90

CHEESE HERITAGE CENTER

Wisconsin
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$300,000

If dropping an 80 pound cheese wedge at midnight on New Year's Eve isn't cheesy enough, the self-proclaimed Cheese Capital of the World is undertaking "another venture to embellish that claim."¹²⁵⁷ And this one is being paid for with government cheese.



The U.S. Department of Agriculture is providing \$300,000 to Plymouth, Wisconsin, to create "a cheese-themed retail store and heritage center" in an abandoned building. The grant will "establish a new business revolving loan fund (RLF) that will issue an initial zero percent interest loan to the project," which is "a cheese themed retail and heritage center," explains Brian Yerges, Plymouth city administrator/utilities manager.¹²⁵⁸

Say Cheese! The self-proclaimed Cheese Capital of the World is getting government cheese to celebrate its cheesy heritage.

"Part of the rationale of the project is to provide tourists with an opportunity to buy the cheeses that are made and packaged in the community rather than directing them to supermarkets," according to Yerges.¹²⁵⁹

Plymouth Mayor Donald Pohlman says the project is "building upon our history as 'Cheese Capital of the World.'"¹²⁶⁰

"Plymouth has a long and rich history in the cheese industry," according to the *Cheese Reporter*, which notes the area of town where cheese was processed is known locally as Cheeseville.¹²⁶¹ The city is home to Sargento Foods, Sartori Company and Masters Gallery Foods, and a Great Lakes Cheese cut and wrap operation.¹²⁶²

The Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, the Wisconsin Cheese Exchange, and the Farmers' Call Board, where cheese was also sold, were also once located in Plymouth.¹²⁶³ Dairy Farmers of America will be joining the list of cheese makers that have left the area when it

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shuts down its processing plant in Plymouth at the end of the year. The closing will put 300 employees out of work.¹²⁶⁴

No matter how you cut it, what really stinks worse than cheese is cutting jobs. And wasting public money when Americans are out of work really grates on taxpayers.

91

RHODE ISLAND VISITOR CENTER

Rhode Island
Department of Transportation
\$9 MILLION

Four years ago, Rhode Island closed its visitors center to save money.¹²⁶⁵ The state is now constructing a new, larger welcome center just ten miles down the road from the old center,¹²⁶⁶ paid for in large part with a \$9 million Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation.¹²⁶⁷

The total cost of the 6,000 square-foot welcome center is estimated to be \$12 million, including the purchase of 20-acres of property near the Connecticut border.¹²⁶⁸

The new government-run visitors center pushes out private plans to build a Love's Travel Stop & Country Stores travel plaza on the land. Those efforts "were bogged down by local permitting roadblocks" even after Love's successfully sued the local Planning Board.¹²⁶⁹

While state politicians say the welcome center will create jobs, local business owners fear it will have the opposite effect.

"Investing in local infrastructure projects like this is one of the most effective strategies we have to create good-paying jobs for Rhode Island families," says Congressman David Cicilline.¹²⁷⁰

Local gas station owners, however, counter that their businesses will be hurt by the visitors center because it will include fueling stations. "I don't know how we are going to survive," says station owner Vijay Patel.¹²⁷¹

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“This travel plaza will be located at the gateway to our state, and will serve as an important feature in our tourism efforts,” said Governor Gina Raimondo. “I look forward to having this world-class facility in place so that every visitor can have a warm welcome to our Rhode Island, find new ways to stay connected and travel around the state, and learn more about all that we have to offer.”¹²⁷²

But visitors may be more concerned about the condition of the bridges and roads in the state than the visitors center. With nearly one in every four bridges rated as structurally deficient, Rhode Island has the worst percentage of bad bridges in the country, according to the American Road & Transportation Builders Association.¹²⁷³ Many of those bridges are part of Interstate 95,¹²⁷⁴ along which the new visitors center will be built.¹²⁷⁵ To pay for the bridge repairs, the governor has put forth a most uninviting proposal to charge a toll on trucks for using the state’s bridges.¹²⁷⁶

Under a separate project, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) plans to re-open the old welcome center as a truck stop.¹²⁷⁷

Rather than spending millions of dollars on an unnecessary visitors center, motorists and taxpayers would welcome spending federal transportation dollars making roads and bridges safer.



Welcome to Rhode Island, the state with the worst percentage of structurally deficient bridges in the nation.

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92

GUPPY FISHING

Massachusetts
National Science Foundation
\$899,000

Do guppies give in to peer pressure?

The National Science Foundation is spending \$899,000 studying “the social interactions of guppies” to find out.¹²⁷⁸

It may sound fishy, but Bronwyn Heather Bleakley, an associate biology professor at Stonehill College in Massachusetts who received a grant to conduct the research, says it has applications to people. “Humans and fish share evolutionary history in the ocean,” according to Bleakley and she hopes her findings on guppies can be used by researchers who study human social behaviors.

This grant is more than just the catch of the day. Noting “good science takes time,”¹²⁷⁹ Bleakley will be spending the next five years staring at the fish to come up with some answers.¹²⁸⁰

But first, she will hang a “Gone Fishing” sign on her door since the grant is covering the cost of a group trip to Trinidad to catch wild guppies for the project.¹²⁸¹

“We head there in the next four or five months to get the fish and get the main part of the project up and running,” Bleakley said in August, which puts the taxpayer funded Caribbean get-away sometime in the winter months.¹²⁸²

As part of the research, a student “may put two bold guppies in a tank with a pair of shy guppies to examine how they behave as they hang out together.”¹²⁸³

The study “will really tease apart how cooperation emerges from interactions between individuals and to what extent a partner can influence another partner’s behavior and to what extent an individual is sensitive to what social partners are doing, and if those effects are felt across general environments,” says Bleakley.¹²⁸⁴ “While guppies are known to change their behavior based on their particular social partner, little is known about how partners influence

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each other or why some fish modify their behavior more than others. Bleakley plans to determine how gene expression, hormone secretion and aspects of guppy anatomy impact this cooperation.”¹²⁸⁵

“It’s not a linear leap to go from fish to humans.” But she point out that guppies are “very social. There are not many animals that display true cooperation and fewer doing it with nonrelatives.”¹²⁸⁶

So why not just study yuppies instead of guppies?



“The idea for this project has actually been in the works for quite some time,” notes Bleakley. “It wasn’t like there was this singular inventive and creative moment,” says Bleakley. “This was the result of more than 10 years of work.”¹²⁸⁷

“To receive a grant of this magnitude and scope from the NSF represents a major endorsement of the quality of scientific research being conducted at the College today. Professor Bleakley is charting exciting territory,” said Provost Joseph Favazza.¹²⁸⁸

While the project may result in some interesting findings, it is difficult to justify putting taxpayers on the hook for nearly \$1 million to fund it. And when continued funding is requested for the project next year, NSF should say “Go fish!”

Fishy study? The National Science Foundation is spending nearly a million dollars to see if guppies give in to peer pressure.

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93 FURNISHING A MICROBREWERY

New York
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$68,000

A microbrewery in Batavia, New York is getting new furnishings and equipment paid for on the tab of taxpayers thanks to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

A \$67,825 USDA grant was awarded to a restaurant incubator plan devised by the Batavia Development Corporation called freshLAB.¹²⁸⁹ FreshLAB “will funnel the money to entrepreneurs Matt Gray and Jonathan Mager for equipment and furnishings at their newly named Batavia Brewing Co. and for a second restaurant in a ‘food hall-esque’ set-up.”¹²⁹⁰

Batavia Brewing Co. will serve craft beers, wines, spirits, and ciders, but the owners are shunning calling the watering hole a bar.¹²⁹¹ “We’re trying to avoid the bar label. We’re going for the person leaving work at 5 who wants to enjoy a pint,” notes Mager.¹²⁹²

Beers will range from the very dark hearty ones to lighter pilsners, plus some experimental flavors.¹²⁹³ “We’ll be able to sell growlers (up to 64 ounces),” says Mager.¹²⁹⁴ The brewery is expected to open next summer.¹²⁹⁵

While Batavia Brewing Co. will be “the anchor tenant,” a restaurant in the adjacent space will “serve as a trial business.”¹²⁹⁶ The restaurant will have a one-page menu.¹²⁹⁷ “The beauty of having a small one-page menu is that we can be flexible,” says Gray.

“There will be counter space, the brewery, food, drink and merriment,” promises Economic Development Coordinator Julie Pacatte.¹²⁹⁸

There is no shortage of restaurants in the area, but that is part of what attracted the owners to opening the business in Batavia. “It came down to, is we believe in the clustering effect,” Gray explains. “There are so many good restaurants and so much good nightlife already down in this area.”¹²⁹⁹

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“We picked Batavia because the other restaurants will help it become a destination,” Gray points out. “We wanted walkability and to be near festivals and carnivals and be near other restaurants and bars in the area.”¹³⁰⁰

With the addition of the microbrewery and restaurant, “Batavia is going to rock and roll and grow,” predicts Economic Development Center CEO Steve Hyde.¹³⁰¹

USDA Rural Development Western Region area director Jim Walfrand says “this project falls under ‘know your farm, know your food,’” noting “this kind of fit the bill for that program.”¹³⁰² And that bar bill is being picked up by taxpayers.

94 **#ANGRYTWEETS & #HEARTATTACKS**
Pennsylvania
National Institutes of Health
\$668,000

@taxpayers #NIH spending your \$\$\$ snooping on #Twitter to gauge your #HeartHealth.

A \$668,000 study titled “Twitter and Cardiovascular Health” funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH)¹³⁰³ is looking for a correlation between negative language in tweets and increased risk for heart disease.¹³⁰⁴

“Because people tweet from the heart—no pun intended—it may tell us a lot about people’s health in important ways,” says Dr. David Asch of the University of Pennsylvania, who is one of the study’s investigators.¹³⁰⁵ “One-fifth of the world’s population uses Facebook and Twitter and the kinds of things that people tweet reveal something about health in a kind of interesting way,” Asch notes.¹³⁰⁶

“Social media vernacular” is being examined “with an emphasis on phrases’ meanings, instead of a literal take on the tweets content. For instance, a tweet that says someone is about to have a heart attack is often an exaggeration, and would be evaluated differently than other tweets displaying a generally negative outlook.”¹³⁰⁷

The study is being led by Raina Merchant, MD, Director of the Penn Social Media and Health Innovation Lab.¹³⁰⁸

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This is a follow-up to another NIH funded study by the school published in February that linked the use of negative language on Twitter to increased risk for cardiovascular mortality.¹³⁰⁹ That study found Twitter users whose posts included “words exhibiting hostility (mostly profanity), fatigue (boring, tired, sore, sleep) and interpersonal tension (hate, jealous, drama, liar)” were more likely to die from a heart attack and other complications resulting from atherosclerotic heart disease (AHD).¹³¹⁰ While much of the language found to have a correlation with AHD mortality is unprintable here, #Mondays, #grrrr, and #soooooo were among the terms associated with hostility and heart problems.¹³¹¹

The new research is “seeking a deeper understanding of the relationship” between negative tweets and heart health.¹³¹² If a strong correlation “between the gloomy social media sharing and heart health” can be demonstrated, the researchers believe Twitter may have some “medical usefulness.”¹³¹³ Tweets could, for example, be used as a “surveillance tool for heart disease.”¹³¹⁴

Asch goes so far as to suggest social media could be utilized “diagnostically or therapeutically.”¹³¹⁵ But can #emergaTweets really replace a #F2F visit with a doctor?

Not likely, which is why patients should continue to rely upon standard medical methods such as a physical exam, blood tests, electrocardiogram, chest x-ray, and echocardiography to determine their risk for heart disease.¹³¹⁶

@NIH could prevent @taxpayers #HeartAttack by stopping #GovernmentWaste.



#MeanTweets may be a #symptom of #HeartAttack risk according to @NIH studies.

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95 ABANDONED TRAIN STATIONS

Virginia, South Dakota
Department of Transportation
\$823,900

The Department of Transportation is on the wrong track, spending nearly \$1 million to renovate unused train stations while thousands of the nation's bridges are in desperate need of repair.

One out of every four of the 5,875 bridges in South Dakota is structurally deficient or functionally obsolete.¹³¹⁷ Yet, the state spent \$500,000 of federal transportation funds to refurbish a train depot decommissioned in 1958 to be a museum of sorts.^{1318 1319}

The Chicago and North Western railroad built the Fort Pierre depot in 1906, but for the past 50 years it has been serving as a farm building on a ranch 176 miles away.¹³²⁰ The structure had to be transported back on a moving truck.¹³²¹

Those involved with the project "have resisted saying" the depot is going to be a museum because the federal Transportation Enhancement grant paying for the project "wouldn't pay for building or refurbishing a museum. But it would pay for refurbishing a transportation artifact."¹³²² While they may be trying to cover their tracks, this project clearly violates the program's intent.

The money is paying to refurbish "an artifact that will hold other artifacts – virtually all, in one way or another, having to do with the railroad that brought everything to the middle of South Dakota once the depot opened in 1906," explains Gary Grittner of Fort Pierre's Bring It Home Committee.¹³²³



Half-a-million dollars are being spent to refurbish a decommissioned train depot in South Dakota which was being used a farm building.

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In Virginia, where more than one in four of the state's 13,765 bridges is structurally deficient or functionally obsolete,¹³²⁴ \$323,900 is being spent to restore a long abandoned train station in Tazewell.¹³²⁵

Constructed in 1928, the former Norfolk & Western train station discontinued passenger service in 1959 and was decommissioned in 1974.¹³²⁶ It was used for storage until the Town of Tazewell, a southern Appalachian town of less than 5,000 residents, purchased it from the Norfolk Southern Corporation in 2012.¹³²⁷

Terry Mullins, vice-mayor and chair of the restoration committee, noted that "a variety of plans and re-purposing of the depot are being discussed and that suggestions are welcomed."¹³²⁸

The grants for both train station projects were provided by the federal Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) which is "intended to help local sponsors fund community based projects that expand nonmotorized travel choices and enhance the transportation experience by improving the cultural, historical and environmental aspects of the transportation infrastructure. The program does not fund traditional roadway projects or provide maintenance for these facilities."¹³²⁹

Whatever the locomotive for the program, the result of taxpayers are being railroaded. Federal funding on these types of projects should be stopped in its tracks.



More than \$300,000 is being spent to renovate this train station that has not served passengers in nearly 60 years in a Virginia town with fewer than 5,000 residents.

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96 THE WINE GLASS HALF FULL

New York
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$176,000

A New York businessman's glass is half full with taxpayer money that will help launch a winery, but other vineyards in the surrounding area are not happy the government is subsidizing a competitor.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) awarded a \$175,723 Value-Added Producer Grant to Philip DeLuke who is opening Northern Flow Vineyards next May inside his current business, DeLuke's Garden Center.¹³³⁰

The free federal cash must be matched with his own money. "I'll have half-priced stuff for three years with the grant," notes DeLuke.¹³³¹

He will have three years to use the grant money, but DeLuke expects that "it won't take long to spend that much money." New computers for checkout counters and "point-of-sale software" will be purchased with the grant. It will also cover some of the expenses for "tasting room labor and anything to do with selling the product — new signs, websites, newspaper advertising and consultation from other wineries." He thinks "a new sign could be \$10,000 or \$20,000." The funding will also cover "a lot of advertising and marketing" to promote his wine.¹³³²

"We're going to have 1,200 to 1,400 cases of wine ready to go in the spring," predicts DeLuke. He expects "much of his wine will be bought by women who purchase flowers" at his garden center. "Whether they live here year-round or have seasonal cottages, all of those women who come here to buy flowers are wine drinkers who like to go to the tasting rooms," he says.¹³³³

Other vintners in the area "have cried foul after learning a startup winery netted" the federal money.¹³³⁴

"The government is picking winners and losers, and it's not fair to the businesses that haven't gotten grants," says Steven Conaway, who opened Thousand Islands Winery in 2002.

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His annual marketing budget is “less than a third” of the federal grant that was handed out to DeLuke. “I’m not happy that I’m funding his winery for him through my tax dollars,” says a frustrated Conaway. “Competing against government money puts me and every other small winery up here at a severe disadvantage.”¹³³⁵

The owner of Otter Creek Winery, Kyle Hafemann, said he was “stumped” after hearing about the government grant, noting his marketing budget is only a fraction of the amount provided to DeLuke. “I get that he’s trying to get going, but I did it all on my own and never got a penny for my business that’s been open nearly 10 years,” he said.¹³³⁶

Philip Randazzo, who owns Coyote Moon Vineyards, believes the USDA should not be paying for marketing for individual businesses because it makes “it more difficult for businesses doing it the old fashioned way and earning it with their own money isn’t really fair.”¹³³⁷

The federal grant is not the only public assistance the new winery is receiving either. Northern Flow Vineyards is also receiving support from a state-funded “I Love NY” marketing campaign that is promoting some of the state’s craft beverage industry. The \$182,000 marketing campaign began in September and will last for 18 months.¹³³⁸

Roger Reifensnyder, the owner of Dark Island Spirits distillery, which will also be promoted in the state-funded campaign, says the grant to Northern Flow Vineyards “sounds bizarre because we’re all already involved in one plan. I don’t think it’s fair for someone to get free money that puts them in direct competition with someone who’s putting in their money.” He says he has never applied for grants “as a matter of principle.”¹³³⁹



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97 GATOR ALLEY

Alabama
Department of Transportation
\$320,000

Taxpayers can literally say “see you later alligator” to hundreds of thousands of tax dollars intended for transportation improvements in Alabama.

The Alabama Department of Transportation is spending \$320,075 from the federal Transportation Alternatives Program to give a makeover to an alligator sightseeing spot over D’Olive Creek in Daphne known as Gator Alley a makeover.¹³⁴⁰ This includes creating an overlook from which to spot alligators in the water below.¹³⁴¹

The parking lot will also be expanded and a nearby island will be landscaped.¹³⁴² Some rocks and natural boulders will be added to the area as well.¹³⁴³

Those who want to try to catch a glimpse of an alligator are probably in more danger of being hit by a passing car than bit by a hungry gator. Three pedestrians were struck by a car in the crosswalk to Gator Alley earlier this year.¹³⁴⁴ Safety improvements to the crosswalk are planned and should be a higher priority than creating the sightseeing overlook for tourists or doing a marsh makeover for alligators.

The city applied for the grant in 2012 but the project is just getting underway.¹³⁴⁵ “We’re moving at the speed of government unfortunately,” lamented Public Works Director Richard Johnson.

“We’ve always wanted to do it but we just hadn’t found a way to pay for it,” said Councilman Ron Scott.¹³⁴⁶

But as Mayor Dane Haygood notes, “when you have opportunities to expand by winning some of these grants, certainly that’s a great way to do it from a cost perspective.”¹³⁴⁷

Some in the area question if this is the best way to spend transportation money or even to improve Gator Alley. “What a waste of highway money,” commented one post on Facebook while another suggested “improve [Gator Alley] by making gators visit in the first place.”¹³⁴⁸

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THE FARCE AWAKENS

Twenty-five percent of the roads in the state are in poor or mediocre condition.¹³⁴⁹
More than 3,600 of Alabama bridges are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete.¹³⁵⁰



An alligator viewed from the boardwalk of Gator Alley in Daphne, Alabama.

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98

GARDEN STATE GROWING

New Jersey
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$40,000

“Let’s talk about green. The color of the landscape? The stuff in your wallet? Either way, it starts with something pretty simple: Plant something.”

So says New Jersey’s “Plant Something” campaign, which is planting federal funds in a public relations effort to encourage “people to plant something” and “live a better life.”¹³⁵¹

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is supporting Plant Something “by providing the New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association (NJNLA) with a \$40,000 federal Specialty Crop Block Grant. With these funds, the NJNLA has produced brochures, posters, window clings, bumper stickers, and plant stakes as well as two 30-second radio public service announcements conveying the message, ‘Don’t Just Stand There...Plant Something.’”¹³⁵²

Encouraging residents of the “Garden State” to garden is kind of like encouraging a fish to swim. With New Jersey producing “more than 100 different kinds of fruits and vegetables,” the state’s food and agriculture generates more than \$1 billion a year in sales.¹³⁵³ “While most people associate agriculture with our nation’s heartland,” the state’s official website notes “New Jersey is home to more than 9,071 farms covering 715,057 acres of farmland.”¹³⁵⁴ Which all begs the question, why spend money telling Garden State residents to do what they are already doing?

“The Plant Something campaign is designed to resonate with people who might not be your typical gardeners,” says NJNLA Executive Director Dominick Mondì. “We want to connect with non-gardeners and create long-term awareness of the benefits that plants will provide for them, their families and their communities.”¹³⁵⁵

USDA has funded similar efforts in at least 15 states,¹³⁵⁶ including Arizona, California, Georgia, Idaho, Massachusetts, Montana, Ohio, and Tennessee, which have spent federal funds on radio, digital billboard, cable, newspaper advertisements, as well as Facebook and social media postings.¹³⁵⁷

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You can't plant a tree that grows money, but as the New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association has discovered, the federal government can be farmed for free cash.



New Jersey's "Plant Something" campaign is spending \$40,000 on bumper stickers and advertisements, like this one, to encourage residents of the Garden State to garden.¹³⁵⁸

99 BLACK AND BLUE BERRIES

Georgia
U.S. Department of Agriculture
\$2.37 MILLION

Blueberries can be bruised or even squashed during harvesting. Because these damaged berries aren't suitable to be sold in the produce aisle of the supermarket, they end up being sold at a lower cost for use in "processed foods – like blueberry muffins."¹³⁵⁹

As part of a \$2.37 million, four-year project funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the University of Georgia's College of Engineering is utilizing a "Berry Impact Recording Device" (BIRD) to take a closer look at the bruising lives of blueberries with the goal of developing a gentler harvesting system.¹³⁶⁰

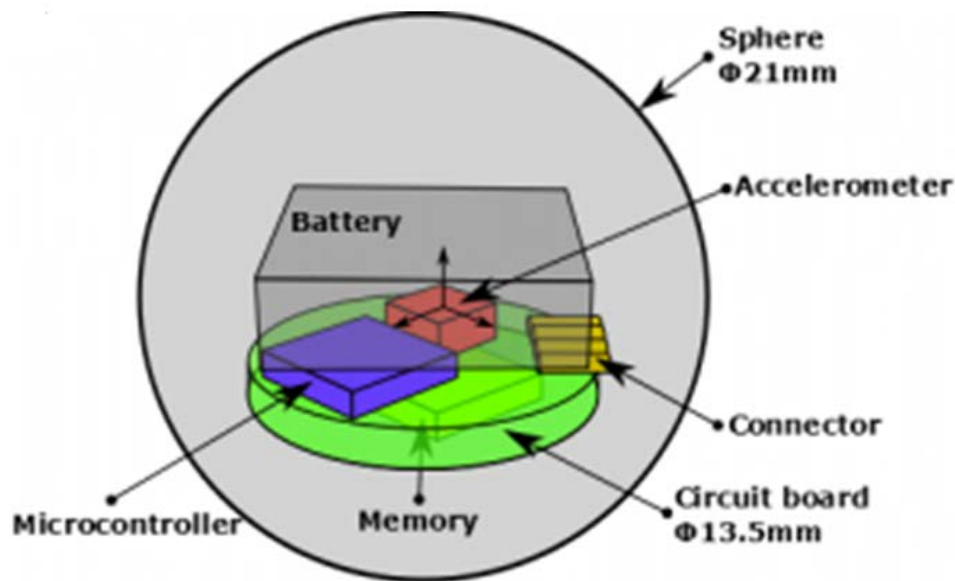
WASTEBOOK

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The “electronic berry,” which is white rather than blue, is intended to imitate the size and weight of a blueberry. As it rides along with the berries through harvesting and packing, an electronic chip contained inside “records the bumps and bruises inflicted on the fruit.”¹³⁶¹ This information is then analyzed to develop a “semi-mechanical harvester that is gentle on the blueberries.”¹³⁶²

The harvester “rolls along rows of blueberry bushes” alongside a worker “with a specially designed ‘shake stick.’ As the worker shakes the bush, the ripe berries fall onto the catch plate. To protect the berries as they fall, the machine generates a gentle cushion of air, like an air hockey table.”¹³⁶³ A prototype is expected by the end of the year.¹³⁶⁴

Considering that the U.S. is the largest producer of blueberries in the world, harvesting more than 564 million pounds of blueberries with a total crop value of more than \$781.8 million in 2012, the blueberry industry should pay to develop its own “bruise-proof” harvesting equipment.¹³⁶⁵



*The internal structure of the Berry Impact Recording Device.*¹³⁶⁶

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101 **GOOD BOOK**
Massachusetts
Institute of Museum and Library Services
\$7,200

Need a recommendation for a good book to read?

If so, you might want to call the Mattapoisett Free Public Library in Massachusetts.

The library “has received a \$7,200 grant to help staff improve reading recommendations to patrons.”¹³⁶⁷ The funding is provided by the Library Services and Technology Act through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).¹³⁶⁸

“Through training, workshops and new reader’s advisory resources, the library staff will be able to answer the ‘can you recommend a good book?’ question with a higher level of success.”¹³⁶⁹ The staff attended a training workshop put on by a readers’ advisory expert.¹³⁷⁰

The library staff “will have a special focus on recommending books for adults who enjoy reading mysteries, but they also plan to improve their ability to advise on titles in other genres.”¹³⁷¹

Library Director Susan Pizzolato points out “recommending ‘a good book’ has many meanings for different people. Our staff will be learning how to better determine the reading preferences of patrons and understand the appeal factors that make a book a good read for someone.”¹³⁷²

The Mattapoisett Library received another grant for \$15,000 from IMLS in 2013 that was spent “to purchase comfortable lounge seating and ottomans, hightop cafe table and chairs,” new books, DVD’s, and laptop computers.¹³⁷³

The library could have saved taxpayers money by using those computers to access goodreads.com, a free popular website that provides book recommendations based upon a reader’s interest and includes reviews, ratings and discussion groups.¹³⁷⁴

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THE FARCE AWAKENS

Of course, the library should recommend WASTEBOOK 2015 to all of its readers since it is featured in it.



"Can you recommend a good book?" A Massachusetts library is spending a federal grant to train its staff how to better answer that question

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