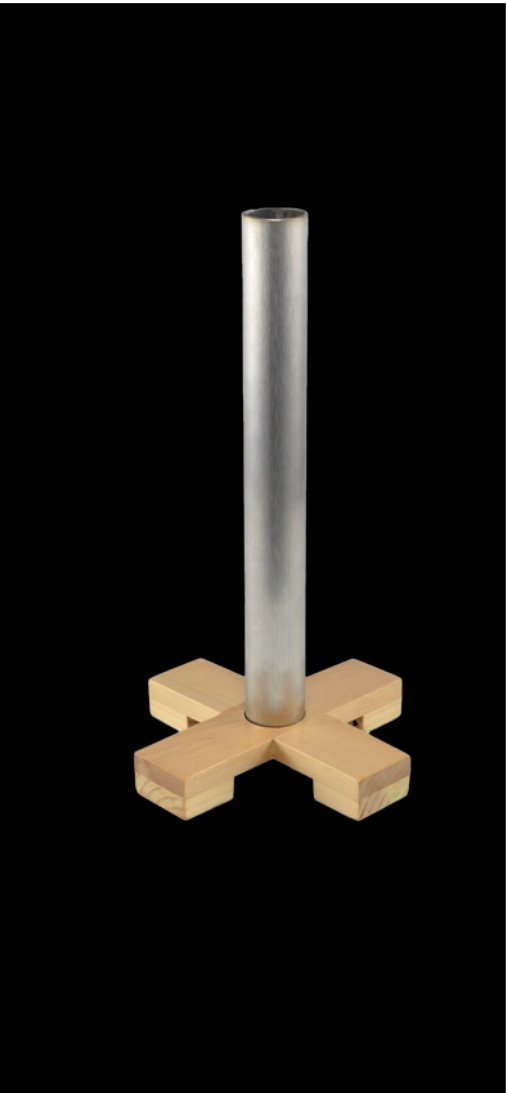




THE FESTIVUS REPORT 2022



Happy Festivus! How is 2022 already coming to a close? What a year it's been. It's safe to say that some big changes have occurred since last year's Festivus Report.

Last Festivus, we lamented over the national debt reaching an astronomical \$28.4 trillion. Shockingly, in one short year, the career politicians and bureaucrats in Washington have managed to breeze right past \$30 trillion without so much as a second thought. The debt has risen so rapidly that the Congressional Budget Office projects that, within the next 30 years, there is not a single year in which the federal budget will balance.

Who's to blame? One need not look further than the \$3.5 trillion that the big government politicians in Congress spent on the so-called Inflation Reduction Act, which ultimately does nothing to truly combat rising inflation rates.

Worse, those same big spenders have just teamed up to pass a pork-laden \$1.9 trillion omnibus spending package for 2023, released in the dead of night, and voted into law without anyone having read it.

This year, I am highlighting a whopping **\$482,276,543,907** of waste, including a steroid-induced hamster fight club, a study to see if kids love their pets, and a study of the romantic patterns of parrots. No matter how much money's already been wasted, politicians keep demanding even more.

As always, the path to fiscal responsibility is often a lonely journey, but as I've done in years past, I will continue my fight against government waste this holiday season. So before we get to the Feats of Strength, it's time for my Airing of (spending) Grievances!

**I have a lot of problems with federal spending, and now
you're gonna hear all about them!**

The Waste of 2022

- Giving ineligible citizens COVID Economic Injury Disaster Grants (SBA).....\$4,500,000,000
- Using COVID relief funds to construct an 11,000 square foot spa..... \$140,000,000
- Using COVID relief funds to purchase luxury cars\$31,500,000
- Wisconsin school using COVID relief funds to upgrade turf fields.....\$1,600,000
- Camouflage uniforms that do not fit the Afghanistan environment (DOD).....\$28,000,000
- Funding a 1.5-mile park in Austin, Texas, used for yoga and concerts (DOD).....\$9,000,000
- Starbucks espresso machines (DOD).....\$192,592
- Interest Payments on the Debt (Treasury).....\$475,000,000,000
- Maintaining 77,000 empty Federal buildings (GSA).....\$1,700,000,000
- “Basic education” projects in Jordan (USAID).....\$210,069,000
- Expanding the Washington, D.C. Streetcar that’s rarely used and unreliable.....\$175,000,000
- Helping illegal immigrants avoid deportation (DHS)..... \$168,000,000
- Mismanaged and un-tracked fuel purchases (State)..... \$77,000,000
- Subsidizing the free New York Staten Island Ferry (DOT).....\$70,000,000
- Overpaying government contractors for a terminated contract (GSA).....\$69,000,000
- East Baton Rouge unused federal housing grants (HUD).....\$13,400,000
- Boosting the Tunisia travel sector during COVID-19 (USAID).....\$50,000,000
- Unused hotel rooms for illegal immigrants (DHS).....\$17,000,000
- Constructing a Gandhi museum.....\$3,000,000
- Watching hamsters fight on steroids (NIH).....\$3,000,000
- Super Bowl commercials telling you to fill out the Census (Commerce).....\$2,500,000
- Injecting 6-month-old beagle puppies with cocaine (NIH)\$2,300,000
- Encouraging Ethiopians to wear shoes (NIH).....\$2,100,000
- Training mice to binge drink alcohol (NIH).....\$1,100,000
- Studying the romance between parrots (NSF).....\$689,222
- Studying the social life and collective intelligence of ants (NSF).....\$675,000
- Using mice to study racial aggression (NIH).....\$519,828
- Redeveloping the United States hard cider market (USDA)..... \$491,794
- A radio campaign telling drivers to stop at railroad crossings (DOT).....\$200,000
- Verifying that kids love their pets (NIH).....\$187,500
- Researching if Thanos could snap his fingers wearing the infinity gauntlet (NSF).....\$118,971

THE REAL DISASTER

SBA made \$4.5 billion worth of improper COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loans

By now there has been a steady stream of reports revealing fraud within federal COVID-19 relief programs, such as when we revealed in our 2021 Festivus Report that the Department of Labor wasted \$36 billion in fraudulent unemployment insurance payments.¹ That comes as no surprise: in an ill-conceived and hasty effort to combat the pandemic, Congress spent \$4.55 trillion across 43 agencies² with little to no oversight or accountability.

One such scheme: the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act³ and the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act⁴ provided \$20 billion for emergency Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) grants. EIDL is an emergency grant program that provides small businesses and private nonprofits with grants up to \$10,000.⁵

The Small Business Administration Office of the Inspector General (SBA OIG) conducted a review of processed emergency EIDL grants which revealed that SBA paid \$4.5 billion more in Emergency EIDL grants to sole proprietors and independent contractors than they were entitled to receive based on established policy.⁶

In a November 2021 report, OIG found that, of the total 117,135 emergency EIDL grants that were recognized as having a high likelihood of an improper payment, 44,920 grants, or 38.3 percent, have been identified as potential fraud risks in previous OIG reports.⁷

You read that right: 38.3% of all emergency EIDL disbursements went to ineligible

participants, when OIG already reported them as being potentially fraudulent!

To be eligible to receive an emergency EIDL grant, a business must not have any current federal debarments or suspensions and is required to disclose any delinquent or defaulted federal loans or debts in the last seven years.⁸ So, how did 44,920 manage to slip through the cracks?

SBA OIG simply concluded the agency “did not implement adequate pre-award controls” and recommended that the Administration “implement” existing prepayment and pre-award procedures. In other words, SBA couldn’t even be bothered to observe its own existing rules. Oh, and do you think SBA ever recovered those funds, even though OIG recommended they do so? Of course not!

UNCLE SAM’S SPA DAY

Broward County, Florida, spent \$140 million in COVID-19 relief funds to construct a luxury hotel...and spa.

When you think of the money the Federal government spent on COVID-19 relief, what comes to mind? Certainly not luxurious spa days, I would imagine.

Well, put your feet up and get ready for this one. Broward County, Florida used \$140 million in COVID-19 relief funds to construct an 800-room luxury hotel overlooking the Atlantic Ocean that includes 30,000 square feet of pool decks, a rooftop bar, and even a 11,000-square-foot spa and fitness center.⁹ The effort is part of a larger \$1 billion project to expand the Broward County Convention Center in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.¹⁰¹¹

And while the Treasury Department ostensibly bans businesses from using

COVID-19 relief aid on large capital projects,¹² in a February 2022 county board meeting,¹³ officials schemed together to find a way around the rule: the money was transferred to the county's general fund and described as a federal payment to cover lost tax revenue.¹⁴ The money was then returned from the general fund back to the project.¹⁵

The intent of COVID-19 pandemic relief programs was to help struggling businesses endure the financial impact of the bureaucratic, government-mandated lockdowns. But good intentions aren't enough; the obscene reality is that local politicians in Florida swindled taxpayers for tens of millions for the benefit of a luxury hotel and spa.

HIT THE BRAKES

MORE THAN \$31.5 MILLION IN COVID-19 RELIEF FUNDS WERE USED TO PURCHASE LUXURY CARS

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States government has spent nearly \$4.55 trillion¹⁶ on relief aid, and, unsurprisingly, in December, the United States Secret Service revealed that more than \$100 billion of it was stolen from COVID-19 relief programs or considered fraudulent.¹⁷

In fact, four people managed to use over \$31.5 million in COVID-19 relief funds to purchase luxury cars. You've got that right: you helped four people – one of whom isn't even a U.S. citizen – purchase luxury cars.

I'm talking really expensive vehicles, here: Porsches, Ferraris and even Lamborghinis. One managed to purchase a whole "fleet" of luxury cars using \$17 million (yes, you read that right) taxpayer dollars,¹⁸ which included a Corvette Stingray, a Porsche Macan and a

Bentley Convertible. Of that, the Federal government has only recouped \$7.2 million.¹⁹ Another man used \$5 million in Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans to purchase a Lamborghini and Ferrari, "among other luxury cars."²⁰

So, while many Americans were stuck at home making banana bread and watching Tiger King, these individuals were living it up with the top down in their fancy cars.

UNCLE SAM'S WALLET: IN NEED OF AN INTERCEPTION

WISCONSIN SCHOOL DISTRICT SPENT \$1.6 MILLION IN COVID RELIEF MONEY TO UPGRADE TURF FIELDS

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Federal government provided upwards of \$190 billion to help schools reopen and financially recover.²¹ However, state or local education departments cannot limit how school districts use these funds,²² as long as the district spends at least 20 percent of their funds helping students recover from learning loss and returning to school safely.²³

You can probably deduce the most likely outcome of this arrangement: schools did the bare minimum to hit this threshold of 20 percent and then used the rest on frivolous projects.

Take Whitewater Unified School District in Wisconsin for example. The district received roughly \$2 million in COVID-19 relief funds, and only used the minimum 20% on students.²⁴ \$1.6 million was left to use on other projects, and they decided to use it all on upgrading the school athletic fields.²⁵ Now we know where the school district's priorities

are – and it’s not helping students recover from months of remote learning!

The district’s athletic officials claimed the schools’ turf fields “needed repair after heavy flooding,” yet the athletic director said later “If we don’t do it now with this money, I’m not sure when we would ever do something like this. I don’t see us being a district that would go to a referendum for turf fields.”²⁶ So, the fields *needed* repair, yet the district didn’t quite know when they’d get around to the concern. Must have been a serious problem!

And on July 26, 2021, Whitewater Unified School District held its Turf Ground Breaking Ceremony,²⁷ highlighting the upgrades made with your tax dollars: a new turf stadium field, turf varsity baseball field, turf varsity softball field; tennis court to pulverize and replace, track resurfacing, and a generous contribution for future turf replacement.²⁸

These funds, which are worth more than \$800 per student in the Whitewater Unified School District,²⁹ could have clearly gone a long way in tackling the learning gap caused by tyrannical lockdowns and mandated remote learning. The government really knocked it out of the park with this one.

“CAN-SEE” CAMO

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SPENDS \$28 MILLION ON CAMOUFLAGE THAT YOU CAN SEE

A Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) report revealed that the Department of Defense (DOD) spent roughly \$28 million on forest-patterned, “camouflage” uniforms to use in the deserts of Afghanistan. It was later found that the camouflage uniforms were “not based on an

evaluation of its appropriateness for the Afghan environment.”³⁰

After nearly two decades’ worth of spending U.S. blood and treasure in Afghanistan, how do federal bureaucrats still not know what the environment is like? When the SIGAR Inspector General John Sopko was interviewed on the matter, he said what we are all thinking: it was a “dumb decision.”³¹

TEXAN TAXPAYERS TRIFLED WITH

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SPENDS \$9 MILLION TO MAKE AUSTIN, TEXAS MORE BEAUTIFUL

It seems as though the common adage “everything is bigger in Texas” rings true even as it relates to Federal spending. And in our 2020 Festivus Report, we revealed that Galveston Bay, Texas, received \$1.4 million in Federal funds to construct luxury homes on the Laguna Harbor.³² It now looks like the Lone Star State is still fighting for more frivolous construction on the Federal dime.

This time, the reckless spending came from the Army Corps of Engineers through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, who granted the Waterloo Greenway Conservancy and the City of Austin a \$9 million grant for a park in the “Waterloo Greenway Conservancy”.³³ The plan is to plant trees and create a park that spans one-and-a-half miles of an area called “The Confluence”.³⁴

The City argues that the park will clean and cool the surrounding metropolitan air; however, they are also advertising the park as a venue for yoga³⁵ and self-care sessions.³⁶

Maybe Austin can plant Uncle Sam a money tree while they’re at it!

AMERICA THE BREW-TIFUL

**DOD SPENT \$192,592 ON
ESPRESSO MACHINES FROM
STARBUCKS**

For centuries, caffeine has been a staple of the American workplace, and, while some people prefer elaborate coffee drinks and espresso, others simply prefer a plain old cup o' Joe. But, unfortunately for your wallet, it looks like today's Department of Defense leans toward the former.

As many American taxpayers would be surprised to discover, between 2018 and 2022, the Department of Defense (DoD) Department of the Navy has spent over \$192,952 on top-of-the-line Starbucks espresso machines.³⁷

At least Americans can rest assured that our military personnel will be perky and energetic even as they pour American taxpayer dollars – and perhaps a few overpriced coffee grounds – down the drain.

INTERESTED IN WASTE

**THE DEPARTMENT OF THE
TREASURY SPENT \$475 BILLION
ON INTEREST PAYMENTS IN
FISCAL YEAR 2022**

Just days before Christmas, the big spenders in Washington jammed through a \$1.9 trillion omnibus package for 2023. They released it in the dead of night, allowed for no real debate, and nobody in Washington even read the thing before being asked to vote on it. When this is how Congress funds the government, is it any wonder net interest payments on the debt rose to \$475 billion for fiscal year 2022?³⁸

That's right! The federal government shelled out nearly half a trillion dollars on interest on the debt alone. That's money that doesn't buy a pen, a paperclip, or provide any sort of utility for Americans.

Once you get up to that large of an amount of money, it becomes difficult to visualize. So how much money is \$475 billion exactly? Well, if you were to count to just one billion, at a pace of one number per second, it would take you 31 years, 251 days, 7 hours, 46 minutes, and 40 seconds. Now multiply that by 475.

It used to be a big deal when Congress spent that much money. When Congress bailed out the banks in 2008, it spent about \$700 billion. And that, some argued, was meant to save the entire U.S. economy. Now, we're shelling out just about that much without getting a single thing back for it, and not blinking an eye! Is it any wonder we're this far in the hole when Congress uses Christmas as a cudgel to pass pork-laden spending bills?

SENSELESS STORAGE SQUANDERING

**GOVERNMENT SPENDS UP TO
\$1.7 BILLION ON EMPTY
BUILDINGS**

As the American taxpayer struggles to pay their rent, their taxpayer dollars are going toward even more real estate: Uncle Sam's abandoned buildings and storage units. Yes, you read that right. According to the Office of Management and Budget, the federal government spends more than \$1.7 billion a year to maintain 77,000 empty buildings, as of 2016.³⁹

According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), before the General Services

Administration (GSA) can sell a vacant building, they must first allow other Federal agencies to use the property. If no agencies need the property, GSA must allow state and local governments and certain nonprofit organizations and institutions to use the facilities for “public benefit uses,” such as homeless shelters, educational facilities, or fire and police training centers.⁴⁰ This can make the ultimate selling process even lengthier, all while taxpayers continue to foot the bill.



Image Source: <https://bit.ly/3aDtuSw>

Think of all the American taxpayers currently struggling to purchase a home... why should we be paying for 77,000 properties to be left empty and unused? We may as well be throwing our money into thin air! If a dollar hits the ground in an empty Federal building and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?

BACK TO SCHOOL

USAID SPENT MORE THAN \$210 MILLION ON “BASIC EDUCATION” PROGRAMS IN JORDAN

It looks like Uncle Sam hasn’t only infiltrated *our* students’ classrooms – he’s gone worldwide and taken your money with him! Between Fiscal Year 2020 and Fiscal Year 2021, the State Department’s U.S. Agency for

International Development (USAID) spent over \$210,690,000 on “basic education” in Jordan.⁴¹ Projects included spending over \$40 million to construct and expand schools,⁴² \$2.5 million for workforce development⁴³ and \$3.4 million to help the Government of Jordan Ministry of Education “improve existing management systems” for school utilization.⁴⁴

In fact, while our students were struggling back home during COVID-19 lockdowns, the United States helped the Government of Jordan “procure equipment to produce digital distance-learning content, create video lessons, deliver workbooks to students without digital access, and coach teachers and parents to help children learn through lessons on television and digital platforms.”⁴⁵ All the while, nearly 12 million students in the United States lack any internet access at all.⁴⁶

Since COVID-19 lockdowns have ended and students have mostly returned to in-person learning, it has become increasingly evident that our country’s students need support now more than ever. I believe parents should have the freedom to choose the learning environment they believe is best for their children and keep the Federal government out of our country’s classrooms.

A STREETCAR CALLED WASTE – THE SEQUEL

REVISITING FEDERAL FUNDS TO D.C.’S STREETCAR BOONDOGGLE

Six years ago, we reported on a transit boondoggle in D.C., a streetcar that goes back and forth 2 miles down one street. In that report, I noted the streetcar had just opened years behind schedule, and, in a rare moment of fiscal prudence, the federal government

turned down requests for federal assistance. But, being the federal government, they saw fit to spend \$1.6 million to study an expansion of the streetcar years before the first passenger climbed aboard.⁴⁷

Six years later, we took a second look and found time has not brought about common sense. Uncle Sam has chipped in over \$175 million more on this still wasteful boondoggle over the last six years.⁴⁸

The D.C. Streetcar runs about 2.2 miles end-to-end,⁴⁹ taking about 32 minutes (20 minutes of travel and 12 minutes of waiting).⁵⁰ Google Maps estimates it takes a person about 39 minutes to walk the same route. So, you might save 7 minutes taking the Streetcar.

But even though you may not save much time, Uncle Sam wants to keep expanding the route... using \$175,000,000 of your money.⁵¹ These funds are intended to reconstruct a bridge over rail tracks to, in-part, allow the Streetcar to go further down H Street to the west.⁵² Even some locals don't approve of the project, citing the potential for road congestion⁵³ and arguing that the funds could be "put to better use."⁵⁴

It also seems streetcars aren't all that safe either. In September 2016, the D.C. Streetcar was involved in a collision, resulting in minor injuries to passengers of the other vehicle. No one in the streetcar was harmed, because despite being mid-morning, no one was riding in it.⁵⁵ And, in 2022, the Streetcar was involved in another crash, and there was "no indication" that anyone else was riding it at the time.⁵⁶ Seems like the Streetcar isn't very popular (or safe)!

Perhaps it's time to pull the D.C. Streetcar into the station for good.

UNCLE SAM: PHILANTHROPIST

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES SPENT \$168 MILLION HELPING ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS AVOID DEPORTATION

In 2021, the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement provided the Vera Institute of Justice \$168 million with a one-year contract to provide free legal services to help illegal immigrants avoid deportation.⁵⁷ Per the Vera Institute website, the organization represents and assists unaccompanied immigrants in 20 states with "removal proceedings, develop[ing] best practices, and expand[ing] representation to ensure that no child appears in immigration court alone."⁵⁸

Of the Federal funds received, "a vast majority"⁵⁹ are subcontracted to lawyers who provide legal representation in HHS facilities and immigration courts.⁶⁰ In fact, the government has provided the organization with over \$1.1 billion of your taxpayer dollars since 2008.⁶¹ The gravy train doesn't seem to be slowing down either, considering the Vera Institute has received more in Fiscal Year 2022 than ever before.

Providing hundreds of millions of your hard-earned dollars to help illegal immigrants actively skirt our immigration laws. What border crisis?

MORE FUEL TO THE FIRE

THE STATE DEPARTMENT WASTED \$77 MILLION ON MISMANAGED FUEL PURCHASES

As gas prices over the last year were soaring to new heights, the State Department found a way to blow \$77 million taxpayer dollars on mismanaged gas purchases. The United States Department of State Office of Inspector General (OIG) claimed the reason for the error was due to a lack of “strong management oversight.”⁶²

The mismanagement and “systemic weaknesses in the Department’s management” occurred across 43 overseas missions due to issues such as “insufficient documentation and reviews, improper acceptance procedures and fuel equipment deficiencies.” From Costa Rica to Ireland and Australia, State Department officials simply did not track fuel usage data and spent countless days using unchecked, inaccurate fuel tanks and pump meters.

The next time you’re at the gas pump, just try to imagine what it’d feel like to be able to nonchalantly lose \$77 million.

FREE FERRY RIDES: DESTINATION WASTE

THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION SPENT MORE THAN \$70 MILLION SUBSIDIZING THE STATEN ISLAND FERRY

Almost 25 million people take the Staten Island Ferry⁶³ each year. The cost of a trip is the very attractive price of FREE.⁶⁴

Of course, the city of New York picks up much of that cost...but not all. Federal subsidies cover a lot of the capital costs, such as funding a \$3.5 million replacement of rope wires at a ferry dock;⁶⁵ \$200,000 for seawall repairs at one dock;⁶⁶ \$3.3 million for “vehicle access and nose ramp;”⁶⁷ \$10.5 million for roof replacement, gangway upgrades, and environmental compliance;⁶⁸ \$18.6 million for deck scows (barges);⁶⁹ and an annual payment of roughly \$6.5 million for “Ferry Asset Maintenance.”⁷⁰

With the popularity of this free service, one can only imagine the demand for newer, better ships. That’s why NYC has decided to buy 3 new ferry boats for the Staten Island Ferry. While the total cost comes in at around \$300 million, fear not⁷¹ - Uncle Sam has chipped in about \$11 million.⁷²

CONSULTING CORRUPTION

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION SWINDLED OUT OF \$69 MILLION

The Federal government spends hundreds of billions of dollars⁷³ each year on contracts with millions of private entities. In Washington, D.C., one such firm is McKinsey & Company, who has been paid over \$500 million to provide advice for the General Services Administration (GSA) Federal Acquisition Service (FAS) to improve “performance issues.”⁷⁴

Before renewing their contract in 2016, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) wanted to complete a pre-award audit to determine pricing moving forward. Instead of complying, McKinsey “refused to provide the records required to complete the audit.” So, OIG advised GSA to revoke their contract.⁷⁵ OIG went on to find that a

FAS division director went ahead and paid McKinsey \$69 million - 10 percent *more* McKinsey originally asked for!⁷⁶

Then, instead of OIG recommending that FAS fire the employee who wasted \$69 million, both agencies agreed that the FAS Administrator should simply “assess whether the division director should be involved in future McKinsey contact or contract actions.” Well, with 11 million federal contracts,⁷⁷ this division director has plenty of other opportunities to make ethical - and legal - decisions.

MORE MONEY THAN THEY KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH

EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH WASTED \$13.4 MILLION IN FEDERAL HOUSING GRANTS

The city-parish of East Baton Rouge, Louisiana, has received over \$60.6 million in Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and HOME Investment Partnerships programs over the last 11 years to tackle its affordable housing crisis.⁷⁸ However, over 20% of the funds received between 2010 and 2021 were wasted or left unspent, according to an investigation by The Advocate.⁷⁹ The total amount added up to roughly \$13.4 million – or \$1 out of every \$4.50 – in federal housing grants thrown down the drain.⁸⁰

Even though the federal government had been aware of the problem since at least 2016, when the government threatened to recapture the funds due to unspent grant money,⁸¹ East Baton Rouge Parish Housing Authority continued to receive over \$255,557,414 from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).⁸²

While it may seem daunting to cut a federal or local budget, we can all agree that they have more money than they know what to do with.

TRAVEL TO TUNISIA!

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT GIFTS \$50 MILLION TO ENCOURAGE TOURISM IN TUNISIA

In early 2022, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) unveiled the \$50 million “Visit Tunisia” project to encourage more outside tourism into the country.⁸³ However, it appears that Tunisia doesn’t necessarily need our help to begin with, considering their tourism sector generated over \$1 billion in 2019.⁸⁴ In fact, the country is one of the most visited countries in Africa.

USAID argues that the agency is focused on the bigger picture: increasing the United States market for Tunisian handicrafts.⁸⁵ At least Americans can sleep well at night knowing their federal government cares about tourism in Tunisia...that is, if they aren’t already losing sleep over their tax dollars funding such nonsense!

HOTEL HAVOC

GOVERNMENT SPENDS \$17,000,000 ON EMPTY HOTEL ROOMS FOR IMMIGRANTS

Readers of the Platinum Pig Awards may recall that, in 2018, my staff took a trip to Afghanistan to find the government spent \$60 million on a hotel there that was never used or finished.⁸⁶ It looks like Uncle Sam didn’t learn his lesson. In April 2022, the Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General (OIG) found that, between April and June 2021, U.S.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) spent roughly \$17 million for unused hotel space intended for illegal immigrants.⁸⁷

In March 2021, ICE signed an \$86.9 million short-term contract with the community service organization “Endeavors,” which operates six hotels throughout Texas used to house illegal immigrants.⁸⁸ The contract required ICE to pay up front for 1,239 beds regardless of how many were used.⁸⁹

Well, apparently not many were, because OIG found that the beds left unused were worth a whopping \$16.98 million.⁹⁰ Between the six hotels, usage ranged from only 21 percent to 45 percent.⁹¹ The next time Uncle Sam pursues philanthropic “endeavors,” maybe he should first consider the demand of the services being rendered.

PEACE, LOVE, AND NATIONAL DEBT

FISCAL YEAR 2022 SPENDING BILL INCLUDED \$3 MILLION TO CONSTRUCT A GANDHI MUSEUM

In the Fiscal Year 2022 omnibus spending bill, earmarks were included for the first time in over a decade. These pet projects totaled over \$9 billion... one of which included spending \$3 million on a Mahatma Gandhi museum. What exactly is this museum? The website describes the museum as establishing “a cultural and educational place-based initiative to inspire visitors to embrace these timeless values in their own lives.”⁹²

While the museum is still under construction, the website can’t even decide when it will be completed. One page says they’re aiming for a grand opening in 2022⁹³ (which is clearly almost over), while another says the museum is expected to open in early 2023.⁹⁴

Considering one of the museum’s overall missions is to inspire visitors to be “catalysts for change,” maybe it can inspire Uncle Sam to rein in his excessive spending?

Anabolic steroid abuse captured headlines during the 1954 Olympics, after Russian weightlifters were given testosterone,⁹⁵ and became even more popular in the general public in the 1980s.⁹⁶ Now, steroid abuse is most common in non-athlete male weightlifters in their 20s-30s,⁹⁷ and, along with the misuse unfortunately comes greater rates of anger and aggression.⁹⁸

HAMSTER FIGHT CLUB

GOVERNMENT SPENDS OVER \$3 MILLION WATCHING HAMSTERS ON STEROIDS FIGHT

Unsurprisingly, the government wants to tackle the situation by throwing money at the cause. In fact, since 1996, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has annually awarded Northeastern University over \$3 million dollars to watch steroid-injected hamsters fight to study whether current drugs for aggressive youth suppress steroid-induced aggression.”⁹⁹

Instead of treating steroid-induced aggression with even more drugs, don’t you think it would be more beneficial for them to stop abusing steroids altogether?

But this entire study raises an obvious question: should we be injecting steroids in rodents in the first place?

GAME WITHIN THE GAME

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SPENDS \$2.5 MILLION ON SUPER BOWL ADS

Watching Super Bowl commercials has become such an integral part of watching the game that companies pay millions just to get a coveted spot on your television screen! And the government – always alert for new and novel ways to spend your money – saw these exorbitant fees as an opportunity.

In 2010, during Super Bowl XLIV, the United States Census Bureau spent a whopping \$2.5 million dollars on an advertisement lasting a grand total of thirty seconds.¹⁰⁰ That's \$83,333 per second! That must be a record for how quickly Uncle Sam can waste taxpayers' money.

In the ad, 1980s actor Ed Begley Jr. plays a film director seeking to create a portrait of "every man, woman and child in this beautiful country of ours ... a snapshot of America." Two observers respond: "Isn't that what the Census is doing?" The goal of the commercial was to increase participation in the Census, but ended up simply being ranked as one of the five worst ads of the night,¹⁰¹ with its dry humor being compared to that of "ironic indie movies."¹⁰² Even so, there was no determination that the commercial actually affected Census participation!

We all know the federal government is capable of doing some truly questionable things. Spending 2.5 million of your tax dollars on an ad that should have been benched for the big game definitely makes the list!

THE DOG DAYS ARE OVER

NIH SPENT \$2.3 MILLION INJECTING PUPPIES WITH COCAINE

Animal testing requirements are antiquated. That's why I introduced the FDA Modernization Act, to end an old, unscientific, FDA mandate requiring experimental drugs be tested on animals before humans.¹⁰³ But it looks like the feds don't get the same warm and fuzzy feeling toward animals that most of us have.

The National Institutes of Health National Institute on Drug Abuse gave SRI International \$2.3 million to inject beagle puppies with cocaine.¹⁰⁴ Even after getting the money, SRI International didn't have the correct equipment to drug the puppies, so it sent them over to Charles River Laboratories,¹⁰⁵ the same laboratory that received \$13.5 million to inject monkeys with Ebola, Tuberculosis and other deadly viruses.¹⁰⁶

Watchdog group White Coat Waste Project (WCW) revealed that seven 6-month-old beagle puppies were implanted with a "telemetry unit," used monitor vitals, then were trained to wear a special jacket used to inject them with various drugs, including cocaine.¹⁰⁷

Readers may recall in our 2018 Festivus Report, I updated everyone on a NIH project spending \$874,503 to study the sex habits of Japanese quails on cocaine.¹⁰⁸ What's up with your government's obsession with getting animals high?

IF THE SHOE FITS

NIH SPENT \$2.1 MILLION ON ENCOURAGING ETHIOPIANS TO WEAR SHOES

Elvis Presley once sang “before you abuse, criticize and accuse, just walk a mile in my shoes.” Well, Elvis, what if you prefer to walk barefoot? In Ethiopia, for example, while there is great demand for footwear in rural communities, there is still a “substantial proportion” of Ethiopians that are just unwilling to pay for footwear.¹⁰⁹

But, of course, the United States government wants to tell Ethiopians how to live, and even what to wear...with your money! Between Fiscal Years 2010 – 2014, The National Institutes of Health (NIH) granted the National Human Genome Research Institute \$2,134,835¹¹⁰ over the course of 5 years in an effort to encourage rural Ethiopians to wear shoes.

The grant funded two studies in which researchers held focus groups and interviews with residents of Ethiopian villages to discuss the importance of wearing shoes to prevent foot podoconiosis, a skin disease from prolonged exposure to red clay soils found in many African nations. One of the studies found that while shoe-wearing norms are “changing,” many people still are unable to afford shoes and refrain from buying their children shoes until they reach a certain age.¹¹¹ So, the Federal government is trying to convince foreign citizens to buy something they can’t afford to begin with? And it took \$2.1 million to hold focus groups?

MICE ON MOONSHINE

GOVERNMENT SPENDS MORE THAN \$1.1 MILLION GETTING MICE DRUNK

Alcoholism is a disease affecting over 14.5 million people¹¹² across the United States, and, in 2019, Americans spent nearly \$252 billion on alcoholic beverages¹¹³ which could fund all NIH research on alcoholism and alcohol use¹¹⁴ for the next 453 years. With so much being channeled into new research opportunities and studies, one has to wonder exactly *how* some of these studies are being conducted.

Well, leave it to the Federal government to lower your expectations yet again. The watchdog group White Coat Waste (WCW) found that, since 2017, the NIH has given the University of Concepcion in Chile \$1,101,157¹¹⁵ to study the influence of glycine receptors on alcohol consumption...by training mice to get drunk.

To conduct the study, researchers injected two different types of mice with alcohol within a tight enclosure, recorded their behavior over five minutes, and then compared their reactions.¹¹⁶ Researchers hoped the study would be “a novel opportunity” to treat alcohol use disorders in humans.¹¹⁷ So, you’re saying that humans and mice get drunk the same way?

One has to wonder: does the government really need *that* much money to get some mice tipsy? Just imagine how far \$1.1 million would go at your local dive bar! Sounds like it’s time for last call.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

HHS SPENT \$689,222 TO STUDY ROMANCE BETWEEN PARROTS

Readers of the Platinum Pig Awards are well aware that the Federal government loves spending taxpayers' money on research in an attempt to get to the bottom of many of life's biggest mysteries, such as the feelings of love and happiness.

As if spending your money to research how humans feel and express love may sound ridiculous enough, the government is now funding research to see how *parrots* express love.

In fact, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) granted Cornell University \$689,222 to study social communication in parrots, studying patterns such as social outcomes, if they kiss, and how males make sexual advances.¹¹⁸

I thought this was the Department of Health and *Human* Services supporting the research?

The purpose of the study was to establish parrots as a model for human communication in neuroscience research, and evaluate the extent to which “how we behave and communicate is shaped by who we choose to hang out with every day.”

Surely it doesn't take \$689,222 to figure out that family and friends significantly impact our mannerisms and behaviors, hence the phrase “you are the friends you keep.” In that case, I think the Federal government needs to keep some more fiscally-responsible friends.

MORE GOVERNMENT ANT-ICS

NSF SPENDS \$675,000 TO COMPARE ANT AND HUMAN BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

In 2014, NSF granted Boston University \$675,000 to study the social life and “collective intelligence” of ants and their subfamilies.¹¹⁹ The purpose of the study was “to use ants as an ideal model system to analyze the relationship between sociality and brain evolution,” and to evaluate if life experiences and social situations aid in brain development.



The researchers asserted that using ants in this research is “necessary” to study the design of the human brain. However, there has already been significant research finding that socialization is critical for humans' brain health beginning even in the womb. Maybe the government just likes spending money on countless duplicated research, or maybe they just think it'd be left unnoticed. Either way, it's clear Uncle Sam either needs to rein in the spending or getting a better account-ant.

NO MORE MR. MICE GUY

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTS TO EMULATE THE VIOLENCE OF RACISM BY AGITATING MICE

Between 2018 and 2019, National Institutes of Health (NIH) decided to grant the University of Illinois at Chicago \$519,828 as a part of its study to see if there is any correlation between colorectal cancer risk and structural violence caused by social determinants such as racism.¹²⁰ The idea of the study is that, by studying these warring mice, scientists will have a shared “eureka” moment that will result in concrete ways to mitigate the higher rates of colorectal cancer within Black communities.

Perhaps UI-Chicago and the NIH conveniently forgot that mice have no concept of race altogether. But, at the very least, have these mice fights accomplished their goal of reducing racial disparities in colorectal cancer? Unsurprisingly, there is no evidence to suggest that they have. But, think on the bright side, the researchers probably got to witness some very thrilling MMA-style fights in the lab! That is something that all American taxpayers should be proud to be paying for.

THE APPLE DOESN'T FALL FAR FROM THE (MONEY) TREE

USDA SPENT \$491,794 TO HELP BOOST THE U.S. HARD CIDER MARKET

In 2020, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) at the United States

Department of Agriculture (USDA) gave Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and Cornell University \$491,794¹²¹ to “redevelop” the United States hard cider industry.

That’s right, USDA is spending your money to help encourage Americans to buy more alcohol.

The two universities received the funding as part of USDA’s Agriculture and Food Research Initiative’s (AFRI) Foundational and Applied Science Program, which provides grants to support research aimed at solving “critical societal issues”¹²² regarding food and agriculture. The project was designed to create a “common descriptive sensory language” to help American hard cider producers communicate their products to consumers.¹²³ I don’t know about you, but describing an alcoholic beverage doesn’t seem particularly “critical.”

The research itself is a four-year study in which focus groups of cider-drinkers will smell and taste samples of cider, and establish descriptor words for each one. Of course, there are already existing terms, including taste, mouthfeel, aromas and flavors.¹²⁴ So, why do they need \$500,000 to come up with “a language” of words that already exist? Someone must have had too much hard cider when approving of this!

CAPTAIN CAUTIOUS

GOVERNMENT SPENDS \$200,000 TELLING DRIVERS TO STOP AT RAILROAD CROSSINGS

Just turn on the TV, and you’ll see Americans are victims of violent crime more and more frequently. As crime has ticked up around the country, Americans’ personal safety has become a real and pressing issue for millions.

We all want these problems addressed quickly and effectively, but it looks like the Federal government has different priorities of how best to keep Americans safe... railroad crossings! The Federal Highway Administration spent \$200,000 across 11 states to make radio advertisements to try and reduce the number of vehicle-train collisions in each state.¹²⁵

The public awareness campaign is part of an overall effort to reduce the number of drivers who ignore the flashing signs that indicate a passing train (and ultimately crash).¹²⁶ Shouldn't this already be common sense to anyone who passed their driver's test? The state of Ohio even got the assistance of former "the" Ohio State University football player, Bobby Carpenter, to spread the word on *not* driving into railroads when a train is passing by.¹²⁷ But, then again, how else besides the guard rail, siren, and flashing lights are people going to tell that there is danger ahead?

A BOY AND HIS DOG

NIH SPENT \$187,500 TO VERIFY THAT KIDS LOVE THEIR PETS

It's been said that "if you want a friend in Washington, get a dog." It's a great point: dogs are among the most loyal companions. This sentiment is widespread, considering over 2 million dogs are adopted from animal shelters each year in the United States.¹²⁸ Despite dogs' obvious companionship qualities, the Federal government still granted \$187,500 taxpayer dollars over three years for Kent State University to verify that the relationship between pets and children is beneficial to mental health.¹²⁹ Researchers tested the correlation between pet relationships and those with family and friends, and if a positive relationship with pets can affect "low-quality relationships."¹³⁰

Instead of simply asking children about the mutually beneficial and nurturing bonds they develop with their dogs, researchers decided to over-complicate the process. Why did the government need \$187,500 for this study, when one trip to the humane society or local dog park would have sufficed?

THE REAL INFINITY WAR: NATIONAL DEBT

NSF SPENT \$118,971 TO STUDY IF THANOS COULD SNAP HIS FINGERS IN REAL LIFE

Marvel fans are probably familiar with the 2018 box office hit *Avengers: Infinity War*. The movie follows Iron Man, Thor, and the Hulk as they fight against Thanos, an evil warlord intent on destroying humanity to save the environment (subtle, environmentalists in Hollywood, subtle).

In the movie, Thanos sports an "Infinity Gauntlet," which gives the wearer extraordinary powers merely by snapping one's fingers. Inspired by the film, researchers at Georgia Tech convinced grant reviewers at the National Science Foundation (superhero fans themselves, one assumes) to give them \$118,971 to study if a real-life Thanos could actually snap his fingers while wearing the Infinity Gauntlet.

The study ultimately determined wearing metal gloves while attempting to snap does not generate enough friction between one's fingers to successfully create a snap.¹³¹ In their own words, "[o]ur results suggest that Thanos could not have snapped because of his metal armored fingers. So, it's probably the Hollywood special effects, rather than actual physics, at play!"¹³²

Seems they discovered what they set out to learn, but at what cost? To paraphrase Captain America, the NSF is not looking for forgiveness for wasting American taxpayers' hard-earned money, and it's way past asking for permission.

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