



CHAIRMAN RAND PAUL'S

2018 FESTIVUS REPORT



Happy Festivus! Is 2018 over already? It was just yesterday the national debt was pushing \$20 trillion, and now it's blown \$21 trillion away! What a year! While superhero movies kept dominating the box office, with hits like *Black Panther* and *Infinity War*, there were many changes. *Rosanne* came back... for a little bit. The Spice Girls reunited. And the Cleveland Browns even won a football game!

The Waste Report changed, too. In years past, we published cases of wasteful spending one by one, compiling each at Festivus. Now we're saying "thank u, next" to that format and adopting a more traditional style to better expose the magnitude of government foibles and continue documenting the inventive ways the federal government wastes hard-working Americans' tax dollars. Don't fret - *The Waste Report* isn't going fully annual. It will now instead be seasonal and bundled all together in an "Airing of Grievances" at Festivus.

So here we are, another year past, another year to forget. A government shutdown resolved by hiking spending; nuked budget caps; a debt over \$21 trillion; and Congress okayed \$1.3 trillion in new spending – all in the first three months! An October 2018 report from the Congressional Budget Office showed net interest payments on the debt for fiscal year 2018 at \$371 billion, \$62 billion more than payments for fiscal year 2017. Given such largesse, it may seem like a few million dollars is a drop in the bucket. But to borrow from a line credited to former Senator Everett Dirksen (R-IL): *a million dollars here and there, and pretty soon you're talking about real money.*

This year, *The Waste Report* is highlighting \$114,514,631 of wasted money. We feature an old favorite due for an update and some instant classics, like a study of daydreaming. Exactly where taxes should go, right? No matter how much federal agencies waste, politicians think they've never got enough. But if there's money to waste, there's too much already. So, before the Feats of Strength can begin, there must be an Airing of (spending) Grievances.

**We got a lotta problems with federal spending,
and now you're gonna hear about it!**

So, what does **\$114,514,631** mean to you?

If the waste we found is: \$114,514,617

And the average taxpayer pays about \div 8,128.21

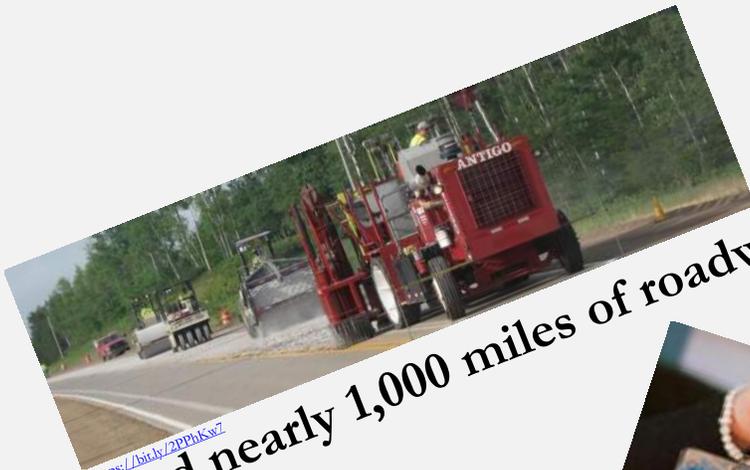
Then, Uncle Sam **WASTED** all the taxes of: 14,088
people

That's about twice the capacity of E.A. Diddle Arena, home of Senator Paul's hometown Western Kentucky Hilltoppers



<https://bit.ly/2EwY7Xq>

*So, what else could **\$114,514,631**
have gotten us?*



<https://bit.ly/2PPhKw7>
Paved nearly 1,000 miles of roadway



<https://bit.ly/2Gp4Dys>
Funded 800 SBA startup loans



<https://go.nasa.gov/2rdJhVN>
Paid for more than
2 months of
NASA Aeronautics

**SO, COULD YOU
HAVE SPENT
\$114,514,631 BETTER
THAN THE FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT DID?**

THE WASTE REPORT'S 2018 AIRING OF GRIEVANCES

The federal government wasted American taxpayer dollars as it...

Provided stipends to soldiers in the Somali National Army (State)	\$76,321,379
Promoted the already overcrowded farmers market industry (USDA)	\$13,400,000
Taught Rwandan special interest groups and citizens how to lobby (State)	\$250,000
Used theater to combat homelessness and poverty (NEA)	\$15,000
Studied the sexual habits of quails on cocaine (NIH)	\$874,503
Funded a fictionalized opera about Prince Harry (NEA)	\$15,000
Made videos marketing U.S. colleges to Indian students (State)	\$75,000
Blew leaf blowers at lizards (NSF)	\$75,691
Supported “legislative priorities” in Libya (State)	\$1,000,000
Put on plays in Afghanistan (State)	\$200,000
Studied horse and donkey hunting on the ancient Anatolian Peninsula (NSF)	\$361,891
Supported Egyptian tourism (State)	\$18,000,000
Paid to bring British student social activists to the U.S. (State)	\$200,000
Encouraged people in the Republic of the Congo to use local resources (State)	\$35,000
Studied daydreaming (NIH)	\$2,488,153
Conceptualized games in India (State)	\$50,000
Paid for museum trips in Bosnia & Herzegovina for Bosnians & Herzegovinians (State)	\$50,000
Developed a Pashto-language TV drama series for Afghanistan (State)	\$653,014
Taught female entrepreneurs in India how to “vlog” (State)	\$50,000
Supported asset seizure programs in Paraguay (State)	\$400,000

TAXPAYER DOLLARS WASTED: \$114,514,631

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ONCE MORE INTO THE WASTE, DEAR FRIENDS

The U.S. Department of State has obligated \$76,321,379 since 2009 to provide stipends to soldiers in the Somali National Army

Somalia has been ruled by warlords and terrorists since the fall of its socialist dictatorship in 1991. Corruption in the Somali National Army (SNA) is so significant that, in 2017, the State Department suspended the majority of its food and fuel aid.¹ But that corruption has not deterred the State Department from obligating \$76,321,379 since 2009 to pay the soldiers making up that army.² And what's worse, eleven years of failure has not deterred the State Department from flushing even more money down the drain. Included in that \$76 million figure is \$8 million from the Bureau of African Affairs (Bureau) to develop a system that includes paying SNA soldiers via a third party.³

That's right! At a time at which the U.S. military has so many troops deployed all over the world, who would be more than happy to receive more in their paychecks, the State Department is supporting the operations of the SNA, a corrupt, incompetent fighting force just as likely to dissolve as it is to join terrorist forces.

Corruption of the Somali National Army

The SNA is so corrupt that the U.S. suspended the majority of its food and fuel aid to the SNA, deeming it untrustworthy.⁴ An official at the State Department characterized the situation as

mutually agreeing “the Somali National Army had failed to meet the standards for accountability for U.S. assistance.”⁵ In 2017, the U.S. sent a team to nine SNA installations to determine if the 5,000 soldiers had received the food aid it had sent, but the U.S. “did not find the expected large quantities of food at any location ... there was no evidence of consumption (except at two bases),” *Reuters* reported a U.S. team as writing.⁶ In fact, the article went on to state that the U.S. team also reported that, along with far fewer numbers of soldiers being present than expected, “many” SNA soldiers “appeared to be wearing brand new uniforms,” noting the situation “implied they were assembled merely to improve appearances.”⁷



Figure 1: SNA soldiers use sticks during training. Photo Credit: Tristan McConnell and Agence France-Presse <https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-05-29/inside-fight-somalias-future>.

The disappearing aid is not limited to food. The AP interviewed SNA soldiers in 2010 (after the U.S. began providing stipends) stationed at Camp Jazira, (which, while the AP noted that it was “government’s main military base,” didn’t have “toilets, a clinic or even a perimeter fence”) and reported, “They had not been paid, some for months, they said, adding that their wages were intercepted by senior officials. When pressed for details, mid-level officers glanced at

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colleagues clutching plastic bags of spaghetti, the day's lunch ration, before saying they could not discuss the problem."⁸ Perhaps this is one cause of trainee soldiers having "their guns confiscated and replaced with sticks after a riot broke out between those who had been paid and those who had not," as the AP also reported.⁹

But ignoring the substantial corruption and other issues with the SNA's ability to carry out its mission with any sort of competency, the Bureau is soliciting a volunteer from a pool of "[o]verseas non-governmental non-profit organizations; Foreign Public Entities (FPEs) and Public International Organizations (PIOs)" to provide stipends instead of the Bureau, according to the State Department.¹⁰ In effect, the Bureau is looking for a middle man because it remains "prepared to pay stipends for up to 3,000 SNA personnel" at monthly rates of \$120 for up to 2,820 personnel, \$135 for 150 personnel, and \$150 for 30 personnel, which would total \$4,357,800 annually, and it's possible that's just for starters.¹¹

The Somali National Army (or Lack Thereof)

One can describe the SNA as, in very generous terms, existing. It has faced fundamental problems, including a lack of weapons.¹² In 2013, then-Defense Minister Abdihakim Fiqi complained, "The arms embargo was lifted almost two months ago and we haven't received a single bullet or one single AK-47 or gun. Nothing. Because of lack of resources."¹³

While the SNA may have had problems with funding for weapons and ammunition, "[s]ince 2009," according to the Bureau's grant, "the United States has provided stipends to SNA forces, with the intent of fostering higher morale, promoting unit cohesion, and reducing incentives to engage in illicit activities."¹⁴

Really? The United States has spent \$76,321,379 to boost the morale for a force it has deemed to be insufficiently trustworthy to receive food or fuel. It is an "army" that remains totally reliant on militias and the UN-mandated and U.S.-funded African Union peacekeeping force.¹⁵

How is your morale as a U.S. taxpayer after reading that?

Not only is the army itself corrupt, but soldiers of the SNA are known to desert at the drop of a hat. The army supposedly has 26,000 soldiers,¹⁶ but a Somali official has previously been quoted as saying, "On payday we have almost 20,000 soldiers," but "[w]hen there's a battle, we can't find 100."¹⁷



Figure 2: (L-R) Then-Prime Minister Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed and then-Defense Minister Abdihakim Haji Fiqi speak to the press in 2011. Photo Credit: Reuters/Omar Faruk <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-army-britain/arms-embargo-lifted-but-somalia-cannot-afford-weapons-minister-idUSBRE9470Z120130508>.

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In 2010, hundreds of French-trained soldiers in a training program in Djibouti funded by the U.S. **deserted, with some joining up with al-Qaida-linked forces,** because they didn't receive their base pay.¹⁸ This is not uncommon. **The AP report in 2010 noted that the training programs' success "is completely dependent on being able to pay the graduates."**¹⁹ According to former Defense Minister Yusuf Mohamed Siyad, if the graduates aren't paid, "then we shouldn't even start. Otherwise the soldiers will just join the opposition."²⁰ This is a sentiment in direct contravention to this grant, which focuses on paying trainees.²¹ If forces in Somalia are fighting for a paycheck, rather than willing to fight to make their country a better place, why should the U.S. taxpayer be responsible for footing the bill for a national Army comprising soldiers with no particular allegiance to the country they are fighting for?

There was a brief moment in 2010 when there was hope for the SNA. **The Somali Federal Government lifted one Mohamed Gelle Kahiye, a veteran of Somalia's army – who a U.S. official described as Somalia's "best hope"**²² – out of a McDonald's restaurant in Germany, where he worked as an assistant manager, and placed him at the head of the SNA.²³ He lasted less than one year before he was fired "after thousands of tons of heavy weaponry were stolen from Somali government stores. ..."²⁴

If the stipends were actually "fostering higher morale, promoting unit cohesion," and reducing desertion and engagement "in illicit activities," this grant could be justified. But the fact of the matter is the SNA is not a

competent fighting force, and no amount of U.S.-backed training, money, equipment, or assistance will help the army that cannot even control its own capital city control the entirety of Somalia.²⁵

The unfortunate truth is that when the State Department provides stipends to SNA soldiers it is, in effect, flushing that money down the drain at a time at which we could be providing that funding to U.S. troops or using it to help pay down our \$21 trillion debt.

FARM FRESH WASTE

The U.S. Department of Agriculture devoted \$13,400,000 toward promoting the already overcrowded farmers market industry

For years, farmers markets have swept the nation. Along with an emphasis on organic food, urban populations have absolutely fawned over farmers markets. Perhaps their popularity is why the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) set aside "[a]pproximately \$13.4 million" in FY18 to "increase domestic consumption of and access to locally and regionally produced agricultural products, and to develop new market opportunities for farm and ranch operations serving local markets by developing, improving, expanding, and providing outreach, training, and technical assistance to, or assisting in the development, improvement, and expansion of domestic farmers markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs (CSA), agritourism activities,

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and other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities.”²⁶

Is Promotional Assistance Called For?

Farmers markets have seen massive growth over the last two decades, **from 2,746 in 1998²⁷ to, as of this writing, over 8,700 listed in the USDA directory.**²⁸

In a 2015 report, the USDA compared “direct-to-consumer” (DTC) sales (which included farmers markets) among three agricultural census years, 2002, 2007, and 2012, finding that DTC sales grew 36% between 1997 and 2002, with the 2002-2007 period bringing 32% growth.²⁹ Between 2007 and 2012, however, DTC sales stayed



Figure 3: A farmers' market in South Bend, Indiana.
Photo Credit: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, photograph by Carol M. Highsmith [LC-DIG-highsm-41142].

relatively level at that mark, with data showing a small, one-percent decrease.³⁰

Though some may believe a one-percent decrease, especially coming after several years of growth in excess of 30 percent, indicates that promotional assistance is called for, it appears those individuals would be wrong.

Rather, the USDA report went on to say that one reason for the number could be that

“consumer demand for local food purchased through DTC outlets may have plateaued, such that DTC outlets are competing for the same consumer dollar.”³¹ Citing other research at the agency, the USDA stated that “[i]n densely populated areas, farmers’ markets often compete with each other for vendors and consumers. In other areas, newer, more strategically located farmers’ markets may lead to the decline of previously established markets.”³²

It seems the situation hasn’t changed in the years since that report. According to *The Boston Globe* in 2017, “The huge growth in markets has led to a once-unimaginable situation: too many markets and not enough shoppers stuffing fennel into eco-friendly totes,” with the article also noting “the widespread feeling that we’ve reached farm-to-city-slicker saturation.”³³ The piece looked at some of the resulting effects on stretched-out farmers, including one farm co-owner saying, “We used to be able to attend one market – now we have to attend two to service that same area.”³⁴

In the Farmers’ Best Interest?

On its website, the AMS states that it “administers programs that create domestic and international marketing opportunities for U.S. producers of food, fiber, and specialty crops.”³⁵ Fair enough. In the best interest of using taxpayer resources, however, one would prefer that it not put \$13 million toward further promotion for a marketplace that may be experiencing plateauing demand and that is already concerned about over-exposure.

While these markets are an avenue for hard-working farmers to sell their products and grow awareness about organic food and their industry, it is doubtful that artificial

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expansion of the marketplace via federal funding will help them achieve their goals.

LOBBYING FOR WASTE

The U.S. Embassy in Rwanda is spending up to \$250,000 to teach special interest groups and citizens in Rwanda to lobby

Washington, D.C., is often called “the swamp” because of how murky the inner workings of the federal government can be. One of these areas is federal appropriations. Though there is a moratorium on earmarking - the provision of funds for the pet projects of various members or well-connected groups - the negative effects can still be felt. And thanks to a grant from the U.S. Department of State, soon Rwandans might be feeling those same effects. Why? **The U.S. Embassy in Rwanda is offering a grant worth between \$200,000 and \$250,000 to teach Rwandan civil society organizations (CSOs) and individuals to “actively engage in the government budget process and advocate for improved financial transparency,” with goals including “[b]uild[ing] the capacity of CSOs... to understand and engage in the government budget process, in particular regarding the reliability, completeness, public availability, and transparent timelines of the Executive Budget proposal.”³⁶ Noble-sounding goals, but do they hold up to scrutiny?**

Rwandan Governance

Though the regime is not in outright civil war or slaughtering its Tutsi population, Rwanda remains a dictatorship in practice. President Paul Kagame has been *de facto* head

of state since 1994. Recently, he shepherded through a constitutional amendment allowing him to keep running for reelection and therefore potentially stay in office until 2034,³⁷ and he won his last election with nearly 99 percent of the vote.³⁸

The State Department voiced “concerns,”³⁹ but clearly it must not think



Figure 4: Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda and *de facto* head of state since 1994. Photo Credit: Getty <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/paul-kagame-rwanda-president-election-rwandan-genocide-tutsi-human-rights-a7843041.html>.

those have risen to the level of withholding American aid to incentivize democratic reformation of the Rwandan government. The concerns also did not stop the Embassy from initiating an effort designed to teach CSOs at what point during the year to “engage in the government budget process. ...”⁴⁰ Why is engagement important? Well, how else will special interest groups ensure they get their piece of the pie if not by “engaging” bureaucrats?

Prior to the domestic earmarking moratorium, that is precisely how special interest groups ensured their chosen interests were included in appropriations bills. And if that's how CSOs and well-connected individuals did business in a constitutional republic with checks and balances, one can

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only imagine what will happen in Kigali, Rwanda, where power is totally centralized.

enlisting the assistance of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

Drain the Swamp at Home, Fill It Overseas

When President Donald Trump was elected in 2016, he won in no small part by running on a platform of draining the swamp. Given that Americans continue to oppose the smoke-filled back rooms in which lobbyists thrive domestically, it is highly questionable for the State Department to be encouraging the practice overseas. **And if the State Department is intent on spending these funds - which are far from necessary - imagine if it were to focus the funds and man-hours necessary to teach Rwandan CSO leaders to lobby the Kagame Administration instead on supplementing efforts to encourage the government to hold free and fair elections.** The Rwandan government would be more responsive to the interests of the Rwandan people, and the State Department wouldn't have to waste Americans' hard-earned tax dollars.

UNCLE SAM HITS SKID ROW

The National Endowment for the Arts spent \$15,000 on "theatrical research and engagement strategies" to combat homelessness and poverty

Los Angeles' Skid Row has long been home to some of the city's poorest residents.⁴¹

But after the passage of time has failed to assuage the homelessness and poverty crisis on Skid Row, the Los Angeles Poverty Department is taking a new approach and



Figure 5: Map of Skid Row, Los Angeles. Photo Credit: Roberto Gudino/UCLA <http://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/skid-row-vs-gallery-row-how-cultural-revitalization-is-changing-downtown-la>.

The Los Angeles Poverty Department received a \$15,000 NEA grant toward what is described as “us[ing] theatrical research and engagement strategies to devise a new work that articulates a community-driven vision of public safety on Skid Row.”⁴² According to the grant, “a series of street performances and public conversations” that “acknowledge the lived experience of community members” will build toward a “full-length” production.⁴³

Already Aware and Responsive

L.A.'s Skid Row is just 0.4 square miles,⁴⁴ but the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) puts its number of homeless at over 4,000.⁴⁵

While LAHSA reported a decrease in the number of homeless in Los Angeles County in 2018 from the year before,⁴⁶ including in the above number in Skid Row, the county overall still faces an over 10% increase from just two years ago after the large spike in 2017,⁴⁷ and the 2018 number “also show[ed] a

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rise in the number of people entering homelessness for the first time," according to LAHSA.⁴⁸

Most people simply do not need statistics, or a play for that matter, to be made aware of the conditions on Skid Row. Many people who have never even been to Los Angeles have heard the term "skid row" and know exactly what it means. It's even in Webster's Dictionary!⁴⁹

While the Los Angeles Poverty Department and the NEA are thinking of theatrical acting, Los Angeles residents are keenly aware of the problem on Skid Row and the overall situation in the county and have a different sort of acting in mind.

In addition to ongoing charitable activities, the electorate approved a ballot measure in 2016 earmarking \$1.2 billion for permanent housing.⁵⁰ But efforts such as the ballot measure make this grant all the more confusing. If a referendum aimed at addressing the chronic homelessness problem passed as a ballot measure, a



Figure 6: Residents of Skid Row receive food. Photo Credit: Monica Almeida, *The New York Times* <https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/editorials/article/To-end-homelessness-California-must-begin-with-7960416.php>.

majority of the L.A. population sees the scale of the matter and is not in need of street performances, let alone a full-length

play, about homelessness to illuminate the problem.

The Best Way to Confront the Problem?

The sheer absurdity of spending any funds whatsoever on what the grant describes as a "theatrical workshop process"⁵¹ to develop performances about chronic homelessness, while so many are suffering, is disheartening to say the least.

Whether it's continuing to work to strengthen the economy and create more job opportunities, or giving the American people back more of their own money so they can have greater resources to contribute to charities or other efforts to help the homeless, it seems there are better ways the federal government could help struggling Americans.

SNORTING YOUR TAXES AWAY

The National Institutes of Health gave \$874,503 over 6 years to a researcher studying the sexual habits of quails that are high on cocaine

Sometimes, there are federal grants that perfectly encapsulate everything broken with the federal scientific research subsidization industry. One such grant is the much-popularized "quails on cocaine" study, originally uncovered by Dr. Tom Coburn (R-OK).

In his 2011 "Wastebook," Dr. Coburn highlighted a \$356,993 study funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to study the relationship between cocaine abuse and

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risky sexual behavior in Japanese quail.⁵² Unfortunately, the research continued for several years, in total lasting from 2010-2016⁵³, and received an additional \$517,510 in the years following the publication of the original report, for a total of \$874,503.⁵⁴

Operating with “preliminary evidence in male Japanese quail that preexposure to cocaine enhances sexual motivation,” as stated on the NIH’s project information page, and using the hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between the “magnitude” of sexual behavior and factors including the amount of cocaine to which the quails were exposed, as well as the frequency of exposure, the study was justified by pointing to previous clinical studies showing “a correlation between cocaine use and risky sexual practices” in humans.⁵⁵

LET THEM EAT WASTE!

The National Endowment for the Arts spent \$15,000 on “*Stoned Prince*,” a fictionalized opera about Prince Harry

Queen Elizabeth II and the members of the British Royal Family were thrilled to celebrate the marriage of Prince Harry, son of Prince Charles and Princess Diana, to American actress Meghan Markle. But they might be less enthused to hear of other events in which “Prince Harry” is slated to feature in the coming years - namely, an opera, supported with \$15,000 by the U.S. federal government through the National Endowment for the Arts, about Queen Elizabeth’s grandson entitled *Stoned Prince*.⁵⁶

For centuries, British royals have been depicted in popular culture – Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII* comes to mind – but this iteration of a fictionalized depiction takes a different approach, to say the least. The project will tell “[a] contemporary story of a rebel who will never be king,”⁵⁷ according to the grant, with American Opera Project’s website saying it “examines moments in the public and imagined private life of His Royal Highness, Prince Harry.”⁵⁸

Not Suitable for Children

Stoned Prince pulls no punches. For example, in the opera, the character of Prince Harry sings his enthusiasm that his guards know the best places to get “blazed, blazed!”⁵⁹ In another moment, the character divulges his indelicate dream of becoming “a pornographic animator” to the audience.⁶⁰ The opera also goes so far as to depict an imagined, and exceedingly crass, account of Prince Harry becoming intimate with a female companion.⁶¹ Surely this is not the sort of behavior and content we want to be exposing to impressionable children and young adults, never mind supporting with federal tax dollars.

A Royal Budget

Not only is the show shockingly crass, but American Opera Projects, Inc., the



Figure 7: Artwork for *Stoned Prince*. Photo Credit: American Opera Projects, Inc. <http://www.aopopera.org/stonedprince/>.

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company responsible, is not short of public and private funders. In addition to funding from the federal government, its donors include New York City, New York State, and such charitable organizations as the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.⁶² But rest assured, American Opera Projects gives the NEA its due, naming it an Impresario alongside its other major donors for the NEA's support of its projects to the tune of more than \$15,000 of your tax dollars.⁶³



Taking the Show on the Road

Figure 8: In 2013, the folks behind *The Stoned Prince* gave Phoenix a preview of the show. Photo Credit: American Opera Projects, Inc. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJLthkGCIkK>.

Development of the opera is slated to continue throughout 2018 before a debut performance in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in early 2019.⁶⁴ The show will then go on the road for a regional premiere in summer 2019 in Santa Cruz, California.⁶⁵

No word yet if it will stop at Wolf Trap in Vienna, Virginia, where *The Waste Report* has previously reported on nearly \$600,000 in taxpayer subsidies going to support entertainment for Washingtonians.⁶⁶

COMICALLY WASTEFUL

The State Department is spending \$75,000 to market U.S. colleges to Indian students

Every year, millions of high school seniors the world over choose where to further their education. Many of them, Americans and international students alike, end up at American institutions. But American institutions' record of successfully recruiting Indian students in particular is not sufficient for the State Department. So, the Public Affairs Section of the U.S Embassy in New Delhi is planning to attract more students by offering a \$75,000 grant for "Let's Get Serious: Comic Videos to Promote Study in the U.S."⁶⁷

Joke of a Grant

The Embassy in New Delhi is looking for at least 10 short videos, "lasting between 30 seconds and 2 minutes," in which "a well-known Indian comedian(s) . . . [will respond] to frequently asked questions about higher education opportunities in the United States, the application process and student life in the United States."⁶⁸ Why is this necessary? The Embassy believes "there are concerns that Indians' interest in studying in the United States may be going down."⁶⁹

Let's Study the Numbers

Since the Embassy thinks this is the case, there must be a year-over-year decline in the number of Indian students attending American schools, right?

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), a non-

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governmental organization (NGO) cooperating with the State Department to collect and study data on international students, there were 186,267 Indian students studying in the U.S. during the 2016-2017 academic year⁷⁰ and 196,271 in 2017-2018.⁷¹ Indeed, they report that **Indian students are the second-largest nationality of foreign students in the United States.**⁷² Further, 2017-2018 saw an increase of 10,004 students, or 5.4 percent, from 2016-2017.⁷³

Politics and Narratives

So where did the State Department get the idea that Indian students need encouragement to attend American schools? Well, according to the head of research for the IIE, who was commenting on declining



Figure 9: Seven countries covered by Executive Order 13769, none of which are India. Photo Credit: CNN <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/27/politics/trump-travel-ban-countries-intl/index.html>.

numbers of “newly arriving international students” overall in 2017, “It’s a mix of factors . . . Concerns around the travel ban had a lot to do with concerns around personal safety based on a few incidents involving international students, and a generalized concern about whether they’re safe.”⁷⁴ One official at the University of Central Missouri was also quoted in *The New York Times* article with a similar opinion, saying, “Although India wasn’t listed as one of the countries [in Executive Order 13769, *Protecting the Nation*

from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States] certainly feeling welcome and safe and all those things is important . . . It would be naïve to say that wasn’t a contributing factor.”⁷⁵ But somebody must have forgotten to tell Indian high school students how unwelcome they are. Even after the so-called “travel ban,” **the Indian student population studying in the United States stands at more than three times what it was for the 1999-2000 school year.**⁷⁶

After a few years of declining levels of Indian students coming to America, the numbers have increased for five years in a row, and while the rate of increase has slowed, the facts, simply put, show no need for any grant like this.⁷⁷ These numbers have fluctuated before and will likely do so again.

According to *U.S. News and World Report*, of the top 10 universities in the world, 8 are located in the United States; 19 of the top 25 are American, too.⁷⁸ Clearly, there is plenty to attract Indian students to American institutions without the State Department enlisting a comedian to make videos about the topic. When the 2017-2018 academic year numbers were released, the U.S. Minister Counselor for Consular Affairs at our Indian embassy stated, “Looking at the past 10 years of data, the number of Indians going to the US has doubled. The reasons are clear: Indian students are looking for a great education and the US continues to offer this.”⁷⁹

But if the State Department is intent on fulfilling this grant, we at *The Waste Report* would like to pitch a joke for the comedian they get: “An American taxpayer walks into the State Department . . . and they ship his wallet to India.”

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BLOWING YOUR TAXES AWAY

The National Science Foundation spent \$75,691 to blow leaf blowers at lizards

Operating under the assumption that hurricanes “are predicted to increase in frequency and magnitude” as a result of “increasing global temperatures,” the National Science Foundation sanctioned a study which, while designed to test the ability of anole lizards to withstand hurricanes in a broader look at natural selection, manifestly was a **study costing \$75,691 on which lizards could hold on to a wooden pole when scientists pointed an active leaf blower at it the longest.**⁸⁰

The researchers looked into whether hurricanes act as tools of natural selection, “favoring” longer-limbed lizards over shorter-limbed ones.⁸¹ The discovery that led to the study was made “serendipitously,” as a news report put it, recounting that it came “when a team of researchers happened to be studying the species at the same time that Hurricanes Irma and Maria struck their habitat in the Turks and Caicos islands in 2017.”⁸² Upon further inspection following the storm, **the researchers “found that the surviving population had larger toe pads, longer forelimbs and shorter hind limbs on average than the lizards surveyed before the storms.”**⁸³ Case closed, right?

Wrong. Rather than accept this finding, the research team decided to take a different approach. **They gathered 47 lizards and blew leaf blowers at them.**⁸⁴

Perhaps the researchers pressed on because there was insufficient evidence to draw a complete conclusion, though it seems an additional 47 lizards would hardly ensure a conclusive finding. Perhaps they thought the controlled environment would help yield sufficient evidence. Whatever the reason, the researchers cranked the leaf blowers up to the equivalent of “tropical storm-force winds,” which the lizards withstood.⁸⁵

They then increased the speed to 102 miles per hour before another increase, to 108 mph, at which point the lizards flew off the wooden pole.⁸⁶



Figure 10: Footage of lizard during the test. Photo Credit: Colin Donihue and Nature Video <https://www.axios.com/hurricanes-accelerate-natural-selection-lizards-fa98a94e-0f48-46fe-80d9-3d3c6e297120.html>.

If one is curious as to why these researchers chose to study the lizards like this, one might look to the grant description on the website of the National Science Foundation for an answer. But unfortunately, one would be found wanting, as no such justification exists.⁸⁷

Even the lead author on the study seemed to acknowledge the humorous vision his methodology evokes in the mind, saying “All the lizard needs is an inside out umbrella and the image would be perfect.”⁸⁸

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WHEN NATION BUILDING GOES WRONG, PT. AD NAUSEUM

The Department of State is spending as much as \$1,000,000 to support "legislative priorities" in Libya

The sweep of the U.S.-Libyan bilateral relationship has been contentious. The 1980s could be called a low point, marked by horrific events including the 1986 attack on a disco in West Berlin that killed three, and injured 229 more,⁸⁹ as well as the 1988 Pan Am Flight 103 bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland that claimed 270 lives, including 189 Americans.⁹⁰

But with the turn of the century came a turn in relations. After years of refusal, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi turned over two Libyans in 1999 to be tried for the Pan Am bombing, with one eventually convicted,⁹¹ (the investigation continues to this day⁹²), and Libya later set up a compensation fund for victims' families as it accepted the responsibility for the bombing.⁹³ Even more significantly, that same year, Libya announced it would end its nuclear weapons program.⁹⁴

And for a time, that trade brought about stability in relations. Libya, though far from a republic, had stopped perpetrating acts of terrorism against American citizens and was becoming a more typical member of the international community. Then, in 2011, the Libyans revolted.

Despite there being no discernable U.S. interest compelling U.S. involvement, the U.S. spearheaded the international intervention to

topple Gaddafi. President Obama committed assets from the United States' armed forces that included but were not limited to attack fighters, stealth bombers, drones, destroyers, nuclear submarines, and assault ships.⁹⁵ And he did all of this without congressional authorization.

But after seven years of failures, Libya's political system is still in shambles, and the country remains chaotic. This comes despite the U.S. continuing to pour money in, spending over **\$400 million on foreign aid alone in Libya since 2011.**⁹⁶

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised, given our own government's track record, that the State Department has decided to tackle Libya's political impasse by ... sending in yet more of your money!

According to the grant, the State Department will be teaching "Libyans involved in the legislative process" how "to more effectively carry out their legislative functions" with a grant that authorizes up to \$1,000,000 in funding.⁹⁷

Specifically, it says the State Department will be providing trainings aimed at developing skills including **forming coalitions, achieving a quorum, "day-to-day operations such as proper office and staff management ... scheduling and time management ... internal and external communication ... research and analysis... legislative drafting ... legislative procedures ... negotiation skills ... [i]ncreas[ing] public outreach by Libyan members, legislators, and staff to increase visibility of their work ... demonstrate progress ... and incorporate**

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public opinion into the legislative development process.”⁹⁸

In May 2018, it looked like change could be in the air when rival Libyan leaders came together in Paris to agree to hold elections on December 10, 2018.⁹⁹ Yet *Reuters* reported on December 6, 2018, that “weeks of fighting in the capital Tripoli between competing groups and almost no progress between the North African country’s two rival parliaments made that impossible.”¹⁰⁰

While the State Department grant was announced over a month before the events in Paris, it’s almost like the grant writers factored



Figure 11: Libyan leaders met with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris in May, 2018. They agreed to hold an election this December. No election has taken place. Photo Credit: Reuters
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security/libyas-december-election-goal-faces-political-legal-security-hurdles-idUSKCN1IV22J>.

in the continuing uncertainty, as their open-ended definition of “Libyan legislative bodies” sets such to be “any branch of government or institution that is recognized by the U.S. government at the time of the activity.”¹⁰¹

But if that assessment was what they had in mind, it unfortunately didn’t stop them from deciding to still send legislative lessons to Libya - courtesy of the American taxpayer!

There is a cruel hypocrisy in Americans’ tax dollars teaching foreign legislatures how to function when our own is broken. While Congress has failed 39 out of 43 years to fund the government under regular order, American tax dollars are funding legislative procedure courses for Libyans. While Congress passed Obamacare, a 2,700-page bill with over 1,500 delegations of authority to unelected bureaucrats, American tax dollars are funding legislative drafting classes for Libyans.

Perhaps these lessons aren’t too basic for the U.S. Congress after all.

TO WASTE, OR NOT TO WASTE

The Department of State is spending \$200,000 to teach Afghan school children about Afghan culture and other topics through school plays

Afghanistan has a long, troubled history. Within the last half century alone, Afghanistan has seen leaders repeatedly toppled, the Soviets invade, a civil war, repressive rule, a sustained U.S. military campaign (the longest in U.S. history) and arguably a second civil war.¹⁰²

In 2010, an AP story looked at one resulting issue from this history of turmoil by examining how conflicts across ethnic lines affected the Afghanistan army and the fight against the Taliban, saying, “Afghanistan has never been a strongly unified nation, but ethnic divisions intensified during the Soviet Union occupation of the 1980s, when resistance factions organized along ethnic lines.”¹⁰³

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In the years since, various news reports have continued to examine the issue, including a 2014 *New York Times* article that noted that even “census workers avoid asking routine questions about ethnicity or language, for fear that the census might find altered proportions of each group in the population and as a result upset the balance of power.”¹⁰⁴

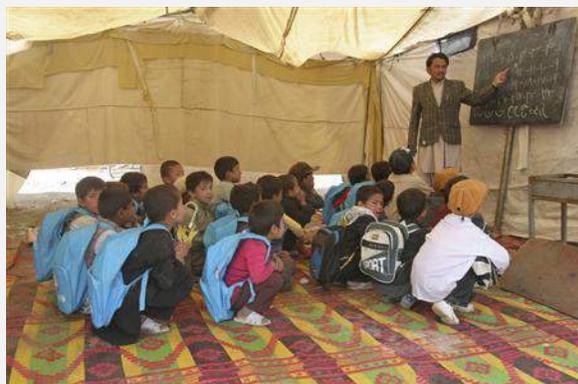


Figure 12: Children attend in school in Ghanzi Province, Afghanistan. Photo Credit: Reuters/Mustafa Andaleb
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-schools-girls/afghan-girls-schools-shut-down-taliban-blamed-idUSBRE8480ZT20120509>.

Outlets including *The Washington Post* have also looked at another controversial matter in the country, with the *Post* reporting earlier this year that “Afghan President Ashraf Ghani inaugurated the long-delayed distribution of electronic national ID cards ... hailing it as an important step toward securing national elections, but his governing partner warned that the move could instead trigger a political and ethnic crisis,” with “[t]he main point of contention” continuing to be “the use of the word ‘Afghan’ on the cards to refer to all Afghan citizens.”¹⁰⁵

But despite these deep-running conflicts, the U.S. Embassy in Kabul must believe Afghanistan is just a few school performances away from turning the page and embracing cultural and national unity. Why else would **the U.S. Embassy in Kabul be spending**

\$200,000 to bring theater classes to “10 to 15 partner schools with an interest in supporting access to the performing arts for young audiences”?¹⁰⁶

A Play! A Play! **My Kingdom in a Play!**

A layman, untrained in the intricate arts of foreign aid, might assume that in the midst of a violent and protracted conflict, a country having been underdeveloped by war, religious and societal repression, and war again, Afghan schools may be in greater need of pencils, paper, and perhaps a bit of security from threats from the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

But apparently the State Department believes Afghan schoolchildren are crying out for something else: theater. According to the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, paying for “**five to 10 distinct performances per school, per year**” about “**Afghanistan’s rich cultural heritage; [t]olerance for differences; [g]ender equality; [p]eaceful conflict resolution; and [p]ositive community engagement,**” for audiences comprised of “an equal ratio of boys and girls,” is a vital step in bringing about positive change.¹⁰⁷

Adding Theater to the Mission?

Today’s Afghan children and even its teenagers do not remember a time when the U.S. military was not in their country. Their teachers surely do – though even they may not recall a time when the country was not plagued by ubiquitous violence and repression. **Despite the State Department’s argument that “[t]he performing arts are a powerful medium for promoting mutual respect and moderate values,”**¹⁰⁸ the reality

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is that the underlying issues at play in Afghanistan go far beyond the scope of what a few dozen plays for some grade school students in 10 to 15 schools could possibly address.

It is also paternalistic to assume that Afghans need the American government's assistance to impart upon its children "a greater understanding of Afghanistan's rich cultural heritage."¹⁰⁹

Americans born after the U.S. entered into Afghanistan are now old enough to enlist to fight there.¹¹⁰ Needless to say, the long war has been a fruitless endeavor. The U.S. went to war in Afghanistan to get Osama bin Laden and dismantle the terrorist networks responsible for attacking us on September 11th. We have done both, and now, we're teaching Afghan children about their own history.

Maybe it's time to give the hook to the American adventure in Afghanistan.

FINDING AN ANCIENT JACKASS WITH YOUR TAXES

The National Science Foundation spent \$361,891 studying horse and donkey hunting and domestication practices on the pre-historic Anatolian Peninsula

How much would you pay to learn how the ancient peoples of the Anatolian plateau hunted and domesticated horses and donkeys? Well, if you're the National Science Foundation (NSF), that answer is, apparently, \$361,891. **On September 30, 2013, the last day of the 2013 fiscal year, the NSF approved a research program to study the**

"history of Asiatic ass and wild horse hunting and the subsequent emergence of domestic horses in the Middle East."¹¹¹

Exploring New Ways to Waste Your Money

It is not that the study of ancient Anatolian equine hunting and domestication practices, though merely exploratory in



Figure 13: While conducting esoteric research about horses and donkeys may be interesting, what did the taxpayer get from it? Photo Credit: Yiorgos GR | Shutterstock <https://www.livescience.com/54258-donkeys.html>.

nature, has no objective scientific value. Learning about the past is certainly a worthy endeavor. But utilizing such a standard could potentially justify research into any topic, as it is excessively broad.

Justifying the research in part, as the researchers in this case did, by claiming to be supporting "international cooperation and collaboration between American, French, German, Canadian and Turkish"¹¹² team members is far outside the scope and purpose of the NSF. **The question must be, what value does the average U.S. taxpayer receive from this research?**

The inescapable answer to that question is very little-- certainly not \$361,891 worth of value. Simply put, **the American people are**

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not well-served by their government funding niche, inapplicable research projects in order to be seen to be supporting scientific research.

Use-It-Or-Lose-It Budgeting

It's entirely possible this project which, again, NSF approved on the last day of the 2013 fiscal year, was an effort to use as much of their 2013 budget as possible before it expired under the "use-it-or-lose-it" federal annual budgeting paradigm.

Offices, at all levels of government, receive a certain amount of funding each fiscal year for their annual budget. Toward the end of the fiscal year, they begin to feel the budget crunch brought on by the rule dictating that if an office fails to use the entirety of its budget in a given fiscal year, it will "lose" the unspent funds for the subsequent fiscal year. In other words, the unspent amount is deemed excess and cut from next year's budget. **According to research funded by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), "spending that originates in the last week of the fiscal year has 2.2 to 5.6 times higher odds of having a lower quality score."**¹¹³

This particular grant is a prime example of one of substandard quality. It is incumbent upon the NSF to ensure that funds go toward projects that are of value to the American people as a whole – not just a few researchers and their teams.

WASTE LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

USAID is spending as much as \$18 million to support Egyptian tourism

Of all the ruins of ancient civilizations, few can match the majesty of Egypt, with the Great Pyramid of Giza (the second-most visited tourist site in the world annually receiving 14.7 million visitors),¹¹⁴ and the Sphinx, the Luxor Temple, and the Valley of



Figure 14: The Great Pyramid of Giza, center, is a Wonder of the Ancient World. Approximately 14.7 million people annually flock to the Giza Plateau to see it in person.

Photo Credit: Skyscanner Ltd.

<https://www.skyscanner.com/tips-and-inspiration/inspiration/9-of-the-most-visited-tourist-attractions-i>.

the Kings, home to King Tut's tomb, just a few of the internationally recognized marvels that attract millions of people to Egypt each year.¹¹⁵ But apparently USAID thinks the ancient wonder of these artifacts is not enough to draw tourists to Egypt anymore. To USAID, it seems the Egyptian tourism industry needs a boost from U.S. tax dollars. That is why **USAID is spending as much as \$18 million over the next four years to "enhance Egypt's cultural heritage assets and competitiveness as a tourism destination. ..."**¹¹⁶

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The grant itself, entitled “Cultural Tourism Development in Egypt,”¹¹⁷ has two goals: to “[i]mprove selected cultural heritage sites that tourists visit” by “help[ing] protect and preserve several sites of historical and cultural value, including lowering the groundwater level at several sites” (which are unidentified) and to “[i]ncrease tourism revenue and local economic benefits at selected cultural tourism destinations” by methods including:¹¹⁸

- “Improv[ing] the skills of tourism-sector workers and the quality of services and products” they provide;¹¹⁹
- Expanding the “[n]umber of tourism-related enterprises,” such as restaurants, hotels, and tour operators;¹²⁰
- Increasing the number of tourists and the amount of money each tourist spends; and¹²¹
- Increasing and improving the number of tourist itineraries.¹²²

Of course, it is true that the 2011 coup that deposed Egypt's former President Hosni Mubarak hurt Egyptian tourism.¹²³ Not even the \$100+ million USAID has devoted to the Egyptian tourist industry since 1995¹²⁴ was able to offset the downturn in tourist revenue which occurred during the political unrest.¹²⁵

But thankfully for Egypt, its tourism sector seems to be recovering. According to the Egyptian government, both its number of tourists and the amount of revenue they generated jumped exponentially in 2018.¹²⁶

Over the first half of 2018 alone, revenues were up 77 percent, to \$4.8 billion, in contrast to the first half of 2017.¹²⁷ The tourist number came in at approximately 5

million, soaring by 41 percent.¹²⁸ Even after the political turmoil began, the number of visitors remained far above historical averages.¹²⁹ In fact, between 2010 and 2015, Egypt averaged roughly four million more tourists per year than it did between 1995 and 2009.¹³⁰

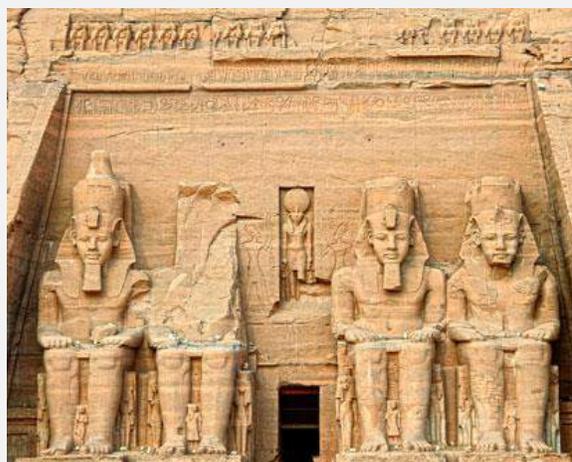


Figure 15: Abu Simbel temples, just one of the archaeological marvels Egypt has to offer. Photo Credit: Destination 360, <http://www.destination360.com/africa/egypt/attraction>.

It is clear that despite political unrest, Egypt will always be a premier destination for sight-seeing. It is the ruins, not the restaurants, that will continue to bring international tourism revenue to Egypt. As one tourism website says, “Egypt . . . is one of the biggest tourist attractions in the world. Scores of historic sites line the Nile River, such as the city of Luxor and the pyramids at Giza.”¹³¹

If any place in the world needs help from the American taxpayer to attract foreign visitors, it certainly is not Egypt.

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INTOLERANT OF WASTE

The U.S. Embassy in London devoted up to \$200,000 to bring British student social activists to the U.S.

Are you British? Do you fancy a free vacation to the United States? Well, chances are you could get one, courtesy of the U.S. Embassy in London.

Avid readers of *The Waste Report* will recall “British Bloggers” and “A Better, More Peaceful Understanding of Waste,” both detailing efforts the U.S. Embassy in London has previously undertaken regarding increasing “understanding” between the historically close friends and allies, the British and American peoples.^{132,133}

This time, the U.S. Embassy in London will be spending up to \$200,000 on two separate trips consisting of “a 14 to 21-day group exchange program to the United States for up to 10 UK-based high school aged participants to focus on efforts in the U.S. to counter hate crimes and build community resilience to conflict.”^{134,135}

American Holidays for British Activists

The first program will provide one set of 10 British high school students, aged 15-18, with a free trip to the U.S. during which “**they will travel to three to four states to explore programs promoting tolerance and inclusion in communities and schools.**”¹³⁶

The second will also provide British students the opportunity to “travel to three to four states to explore programs

promoting tolerance and inclusion in communities and schools,” but the second group will be students aged 18-25.¹³⁷

But there are restrictions on how the students honored with a free multi-week vacation across the pond are chosen. According to the grant notice, **the students selected for both trips must have “demonstrated a passion for promoting social cohesion in their communities,” or be interested in: “[i]nclusion and tolerance”; “[c]ommunity cohesion campaigns”; “[e]conomic and social justice”; “[t]racking and reporting hate crimes”; [and] “[y]outh activism.”**^{138,139}

STILL Not the Best Approach

Apparently, the bureaucrats at the U.S. Embassy in London believe just a handful of school-aged students will be useful in efforts to “[p]revent violent extremism and radicalization by encouraging the building of strong, resilient communities [and facilitate an] [e]xchange of best practices in the U.S. and UK to support social cohesion.”^{140,141}

High school and college students, no matter how precocious, are probably not well-suited to the task of “[p]revent[ing] violent extremism and radicalization by encouraging the building of strong, resilient communities,” and they are also not the most well positioned to exchange “best practices” on any topic, including social cohesion.^{142,143}

State Department missions are supposed to help improve relations with foreign countries, not spark internal conflict abroad as foreign citizens fight for free trips to the United States. But at a time when travel

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agents have largely gone the way of the dinosaurs, the State Department has started a travel agency in an unlikely place: a U.S. Embassy.

PLEASE, LET ME HELP YOU WITH THAT

The State Department offers up to \$35,000 to encourage the Congolese people to use Congolese resources

The State Department has cooked up some exceedingly odd foreign aid programs in the past, and a new funding opportunity from the U.S. Mission to the Republic of the Congo deserves similar ignominious recognition. **The Mission is offering awards up to \$10,000 from an overall fund of \$35,000 to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community groups so that they can “encourage community involvement and the use of local resources and expertise to improve basic economic and social conditions of the local community.”**¹⁴⁴

No, really. That's actually what they are doing with your tax dollars. The Mission isn't directly influencing the economy of communities in the Republic of the Congo. It is paying an NGO or “community group” to **encourage people to become engaged in their community and use already existing “resources and expertise” to improve that community.**¹⁴⁵

This grant comes from the Ambassador's “Special Self-Help Fund,” a special pot of money that prioritizes “projects that advance the goals of diversifying the economy, empowering women and youth, and

expanding English language capability.”¹⁴⁶ The irony of a “self-help fund” that dispenses American tax dollars to the Congolese people is apparently lost on the Mission to the Republic of the Congo.

Transparently Lacking Transparency

American taxpayers deserve answers from the U.S. Mission about the value it is adding to the Republic of the Congo (never mind the United States) in exchange for an amount of money roughly the same as a family of 6 at the poverty line in the contiguous United States would earn in a year.¹⁴⁷ Unfortunately, such answers are unlikely to be forthcoming because of how little information the Mission has provided in the first place. The Mission saw fit to provide fewer than 200 words describing the program itself.¹⁴⁸ This is an all-too-common occurrence across the federal government, not just in the State Department. Thousands and millions of dollars are often doled out like candy with just a few sentences of explanation.

Perhaps instead of paying to stimulate Congolese use of Congolese resources, Americans should be paying to teach State Department officials what is and what is not an appropriate use of taxpayer funds. This grant program, with its strange conceptualization and lack of specificity, is a textbook example of what not to do when creating a funding opportunity.

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WASTE BEYOND YOUR WILDEST (DAY)DREAMS

***The NIH is spending \$2,488,153
to study daydreaming***

Have you ever gotten to the end of a page and couldn't remember what you just read? You're not alone. It's a well-studied phenomenon called "daydream mode" wherein readers continue moving their eyes across the text," but without paying attention to what the text says.¹⁴⁹ Did you ever wonder whether "daydream mode" was more commonly experienced by monolingual or bilingual people? If you said no, you're not alone. **But apparently some researchers did, as did several grant review panels that, on five separate occasions, approved an ongoing project, costing (so far) \$2,488,153, to study daydreaming.**¹⁵⁰ In particular, the study is looking at the differences in the "frequency and duration" of monolingual and bilingual daydreaming, establishing a way to determine "in real-time" whether or not somebody has gone into daydream mode and to "examine the relationship between bilingualism and mind-wandering during reading."¹⁵¹

The researchers are testing the hypothesis that "bilinguals will show generally lower rates of 'mindless reading' . . . but that mindless reading will occur more often when people read in their native language."¹⁵² The hypothesis seems to assume that because reading in a second language requires a high level of attentiveness, daydreaming will be less

common in a second language than in one's native language. Hardly a bold prediction.

This question poses no apparent "public health relevance" (a standard every NIH grant must meet¹⁵³). Neither does a comparison of how often daydreaming occurs while reading handwritten texts and while reading printed texts – which is another part of this research.¹⁵⁴

If NIH bureaucrats want to encourage Americans to study other languages, they should do it on their own dime. If they think they can get away with doing it on the federal dime without being exposed as spendthrifts, they're the ones who are daydreaming.

PLAYING GAMES WITH YOUR MONEY

***The State Department is spending
\$50,000 on a workshop and "game
jam" in India***

Millions around the world have learned the value of strategic thinking by playing chess. But thanks to the State Department, soon humanity may be learning new lessons from another game created in India. That's because **the State Department is spending \$50,000 to put on a workshop for two days and then another two days of a "game jam" for Indian children to think up ideas for "games with a social message."**¹⁵⁵

The State Department justifies the expenditure of your tax dollars on a two-day conference for Indian children to learn about and produce games by saying its goals are to "[s]trengthen people-to-people ties between

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the United States and India ...” and “the capacity of local youth to develop their leadership and problem-solving skills. ...”¹⁵⁶ The program, entitled “Games for Good: Designing Games with a Social Impact,” seeks to recruit 65 to 80 kids in India, grouped 5 to 6 on a team, to develop games centered on a consulate-approved topic – **because nothing screams “fun” to a kid like making up a game about “combating gender-based violence, promoting regional reconciliation in South Asia, interfaith cooperation, [or] highlighting environmental concerns...”**¹⁵⁷

But thinking up a game, within the tightly bound parameters set out by the U.S. Consulate (talk about creative freedom!), will be as far as these kids will get in the game development process. The project isn't actually going to result in games, just the ideas, as the teams **will only make “final pitches [to a panel of expert judges that] will be used to identify any viable game projects which could be funded through separate grants for development and eventual release.”**¹⁵⁸ And don't worry, no expense will be spared. The State Department will be funding the identification of “American and Indian expertise on game design, social cause campaigns, and narrative . . . [as well as providing] international flights, visas, insurance, lodging, local transportation, per diem and honorarium.”¹⁵⁹

This is not the federal government's first foray into children's games. In 2015, the National Science Foundation spent \$450,000 to develop a video game aimed at indoctrinating kids about climate change.¹⁶⁰ **It should give every American pause that the federal government would develop**

content to slyly persuade kids of any point of view, regardless of what it is. And a children's workshop to generate game concepts, without letting the children see the fruits of their labor, is a waste of both time and taxpayer dollars, no matter the good intentions.

WASTE AT THE MUSEUM

The State Department is spending \$50,000 on trips to museums in Bosnia and Herzegovina for Bosnians and Herzegovinians

Every year, after raising big sums of money, hundreds of grade school students descend on Washington, D.C., in order to learn about their nation's history and see some of its most recognizable landmarks. Often these trips include museum visits to see things such as the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, the Wright Brothers' aircraft, or even Dorothy's ruby red slippers from *The Wizard of Oz*.

But while American students sell chocolate bars and run car washes to finance these trips to experience their cultural heritage, **the U.S. Embassy in Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH) is funding “the ‘Night at the Museum’ Civic Education Program[,] which promotes awareness of joint cultural heritage and appreciation for museums as places of learning. ...”**¹⁶¹

No kidding! While Americans scrounge and save all year to send their kids to museums, their State Department is soliciting proposals for a program for “no [fewer] than 400 students from different ethnic groups across the country,” aged 12 to 24, to include

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staying overnight at least three museums in BiH.¹⁶² The proposal makes special note to require the youth participants to “work together at each museum” and that proposals include “follow-up community improvement activities.”¹⁶³



Figure 16: The Fojnica Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Fojnaca, Bosnia houses a museum and is a site of one of the three required overnight stays, courtesy of the U.S. taxpayer. Photo Credit: <https://invictatravel.com/en/monastery/>.

There's no word yet on whether Ben Stiller is slated to appear in this version of *Night at the Museum*, too.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, WASTE (PT. 2)

The State Department spent \$653,014 to develop a Pashto-language TV drama series for Afghanistan

American TV is in a golden age. Never before have there been so many options for content or so many platforms on which to watch it. One common plot, popularized by shows like *Homeland*, *Designated Survivor*, and *The Blacklist*, is the protagonist who reappears after a significant trauma and must adjust to a new situation. **This type of storyline is so popular that the State Department spent**

\$653,014 to produce its own version of it.¹⁶⁴ The only differences will be that the State Department's version will be in Pashto, and it will be broadcast in Afghanistan.

Producers of the show probably feel constrained by the lack of artistic freedom they were given. **The State Department demanded the show would be about “a former militant fighter, disillusioned by his experiences, [who] returns to his village and learns that his dreams of fighting for justice are best fulfilled by becoming an agent of positive change in his community,” according to the funding opportunity notice. “Each episode will highlight a different challenge faced by Afghans (ex: local corruption, access to education, youth unemployment, honor killings, public health, maternal mortality, extremist threats, etc.),” it goes on to say, “and show the main character courageously leading his community to address them – with the support and advice of an intelligent female family member (his mother, sister, or wife).”¹⁶⁵**

The goal of the show, “[i]n addition to the entertainment value of compelling storylines and strong characters,” is in part “to convince audiences that working to address grievances through civic engagement, constructive community involvement and peaceful conflict resolution is more effective than resorting to violent extremism.”¹⁶⁶ The show depicts a Taliban fighter to complement the American position of attempting to broker a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan,¹⁶⁷ a country now ruled by a coalition government that includes the Taliban (yes, the same Taliban we went to Afghanistan to depose in 2001.)

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The State Department has issued two options to extend the run of the show if it proves successful, costing up to another \$700,000 each—*for a total price tag of just more than \$2 million.*¹⁶⁸

The State Department has lost the plot in Afghanistan. Our mission was to capture or kill the terrorists responsible for carrying out the September 11th attacks. We have done that and then some. This is not the time for our government to try to nation-build via TV shows. It's the time to declare victory and bring our troops home.

WASTE OF A PITCH

The State Department spent \$50,000 to teach female entrepreneurs in India to make sales pitches with vlogs

Indian women face serious hardships. Human Rights Watch, an international watchdog, has written extensively about the “need for concerted government action to improve women’s safety and ensure prompt police investigation of . . . crimes” in India, including “gang rapes, domestic violence, acid attacks, and murders of women. . . .”¹⁶⁹ Though strides are being made toward improving conditions for women, there is certainly still work to be done.

And the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi is on the case—offering \$50,000 to teach Indian female entrepreneurs how to “vlog.”¹⁷⁰

Specifically, American taxpayers paid for “SHE VLOGS,” which are “three (3) two-day vlogging (video-blogging)

workshops developed for 75 women entrepreneurs in New Delhi, Chandigarh and Varanasi,” according to the grant, which goes on to say, “The workshops should include hands-on training that will teach 25 participants in each city how to produce 60-second video pitches using commercially available technology. . . . The training should also include a ‘train-the-trainer’ teaching methodology to allow participants to share their new skills with colleagues and peers. . . .”¹⁷¹ Its purpose is to “arm North Indian women entrepreneurs with digital skills to enhance business marketing and branding strategy.”¹⁷²

This grant is an offshoot of the 2017 Global Entrepreneurship Summit, which was “co-hosted by the United States and India under the theme ‘Women First, Prosperity for All.’”¹⁷³ But if the federal government wants to train female entrepreneurs, why not at least train the ones whose taxes pay for this program? More than half of all companies fail in their first five years.¹⁷⁴ Surely up-and-coming American women are just as deserving of entrepreneurship training as their Indian counterparts.

This is not to say that women in India are undeserving of support. But such support should be directed at the more fundamental issues plaguing Indian women. Sexual violence and a draconian judicial system present significant barriers for Indian women.

Human Rights Watch has found that Indian women are subjected to ineffective response from police to sexual violence, often face “lack of access to effective legal assistance,” and are forced to confront “[t]he failure of the state to protect victims of abuse

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[which] can in itself be a violation of human rights.”¹⁷⁵

There is no doubt that entrepreneurship is central to the empowerment of women, both in India and elsewhere. But teaching female Indian entrepreneurs how to market and brand products through video blogging does not address the fundamental challenges they could face.

Perhaps the State Department should focus, for instance, on making sure that Indian women who report crimes are not kept for 12 days while authorities attempt to persuade them to recant their report (as they did when a 13-year-old Indian girl was raped by a wealthy, grown man¹⁷⁶).

Certainly, engaging the Indian government on such matters is a far better use of time for the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi than teaching Indian women how to “vlog.”

SEIZING ON WASTE

The State Department is spending \$400,000 on asset seizure programs in Paraguay

Despite many recent domestic controversies about police seizing assets from individuals before they are even convicted of a crime, the Department of State has decided to start paying for asset seizure programs in Paraguay. In fact, **the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics Law Enforcement (INL) has devoted \$400,000 to the growth and effective management of Paraguay's National Secretariat for the Administration of Seized and Forfeited Assets (SENABICO).**¹⁷⁷



Figure 17: Officers of SENABICO at the Palacio de los López. Photo Available At: <https://www.facebook.com/senabicopy/photos/a.168339340496707/170084476988860/?type=3&theater>.

Modern asset forfeiture schemes stem from the British Navigation Acts, where ships engaged in importing or exporting goods to or from England faced potential seizure if they did not fly the British flag.¹⁷⁸ A little more than a century later, the founders of the United States outlawed unreasonable searches and seizures when they adopted the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution.

Of course, you might expect that the very premise of an asset seizure program is that it pays for itself through the funds and goods it confiscates, but Paraguayan law enforcement had a problem, we learn from the grant: it “could seize assets, but lacked a mechanism for pre-conviction asset forfeiture or liquidation.”¹⁷⁹ In other words, Paraguayan authorities had no efficient way to monetize the large amounts of valuable property they were impounding. A tricky problem indeed.

But Paraguayan law enforcement need not have worried. The Organization of American States, which received \$68 million in FY2017 from the United States (including \$50.4 million in dues and a voluntary donation of \$17.6 million)¹⁸⁰ jumped into action,

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backing an initiative called "Proyecto BIDAD," through which Paraguay drafted and passed legislation authorizing the creation of SENABICO,"¹⁸¹ according to the grant. **INL's grant shows that it was also more than generous, stating INL offered "support for a regional exchange of asset forfeiture experts to facilitate the drafting of SENABICO-implementing regulations that were completed and presented to the Executive in January 2018."**¹⁸² Rather than changing the law to protect the property rights of its people, the Paraguayan



Figure 18: An Ohio Police Department used forfeited funds to bring Sparkles the Clown in for an event. Photo Credit: Ron Fowler https://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/investigative/2014/10/11/asset-seizures-fuel-police-spending/?utm_term=.0aeefe38c1274.

government streamlined its asset forfeiture program – with a little help from the U.S. State Department.

And now the State Department is at it again, having “allocated \$400,000” in order “to support SENABICO’s strong and sound institutional growth from the beginning and help it become effective at managing and liquidating seized and forfeited assets for the benefit of Paraguayan national interests.”¹⁸³

SENABICO’s mandate is reflected in the U.S., as **police departments in some states will take assets based on a standard as low as “suspicion on a par with ‘probable cause.’”**¹⁸⁴

Some claim that civil asset forfeiture is justified because police use the windfalls to purchase equipment their budgets can’t otherwise afford.¹⁸⁵ But using funds garnered from civil asset forfeiture to bring Sparkles the Clown in for an event (as one Ohio police department did¹⁸⁶), or put on a Sheriff’s Award Banquet (\$4,600),¹⁸⁷ or spend over \$600 on a coffee maker¹⁸⁸ rightfully brews up controversy and illustrates just some of the concerns Americans have with the policy.

It is already ridiculous that the American people can have their assets seized *without any proof they’ve done anything wrong*,¹⁸⁹ but it adds insult to injury that they have to watch their tax dollars be used to promote such a policy abroad.



<https://bit.ly/2PSYbTG>

And now, on to the Feats of Strength!

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