



Doug Bandow: Some of the most-wasteful items in the budget

By DOUG BANDOW / Contributing Writer

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If you live anywhere but Washington, D.C., you probably believe that the federal government spends too much. Since 2008, a wave of bailouts and pork barrel “stimulus” outlays pushed the budget to more than \$3.6 trillion. Federal red ink exceeded \$1 trillion four years in a row.

Today, the national debt is more than \$17 trillion. The Congressional Budget Office figured that existing budget plans would add \$6.3 trillion to \$8.8 trillion in red ink over the coming decade. Social Security and Medicare alone account for more than \$100 trillion in unfunded liabilities, promised benefits for which there is no money. Counting a multitude of other debts and obligations, American taxpayers are on the hook for more than \$220 trillion in unfunded liabilities.

However, denizens of Washington see things very differently. Policymakers recently approved a bipartisan budget that increased discretionary spending, theoretically the easiest outlay to control, over the next two years.

It really doesn't matter which party is in charge in Washington. Most Republicans have little desire to cut federal outlays. One man's waste is another man's vote-winning special-interest handout.

Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., has issued a second “Wastebook,” which contains 100 of the dumbest uses of taxpayers' money.

For instance, the National Endowment for the Humanities devoted almost \$1 million to the Popular Romance Project to “explore the fascinating, often-contradictory origins and influences of popular romance as told in novels, films, comics, advice books, songs and Internet fan fiction.”

Some other highlights:

- The \$50 million National Technical Information Service collects business-related information, yet most of its materials are available online.
- The Army spent nearly \$300 million on a blimp for surveillance in Afghanistan – only to drop the project after its inaugural U.S. flight, selling the airship back to its maker for \$301,000.
- The International Trade Association devoted nearly \$300,000 to send Indi Rock music executives on a tour to Brazil.
- The National Institutes for Health dropped \$335,525 on a study which determined that “marriages that were the happiest were the ones in which the wives were able to calm down quickly during marital conflict.”
- The \$1.9 million Senate Office of Education and Training provides classes for staffers on such subjects as sleeping well and making small talk.
- The National Endowment for the Arts used \$10,000 to underwrite the PowerUP Project, which featured choreographed (utility) pole dancing.
- Housing and Urban Development used \$1.2 million to create an apartment designed for the deaf in Tempe, Arizona, then decided that three-quarters of the residences should go to people with normal hearing.
- The Agriculture Department gave an Oklahoma winery \$200,000 to purchase new equipment.
- The National Science Foundation paid Tea Party critics \$400,000 to study the Tea Party.
- The Commerce Department spent \$368,000 to refurbish the manufacturing plant for a golf cart maker.

Sen. Coburn's 100 programs cost about \$30 billion total. While that's a lot of money for most anyone except Bill Gates, it is small change for the federal government. Even eliminating the many wasteful projects that litter the federal bureaucracy would not balance the budget.

Congress should start by killing Coburn's 100. But Americans then need to have an adult conversation about the budget. Too many people expect to live at someone else's expense through Washington – which is why the nation faces financial ruin.

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