

2014 Wastebook: \$25 Billion in Dubious Federal Spending

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Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) recently released his annual report on federal waste, documenting nearly \$25 billion in wasteful government spending, down from \$30 billion documented last year. The report, Wastebook 2014, identifies 100 programs that in Senator Coburn's words, "gives a snapshot of just a fraction of the countless frivolous projects the government funded in the past twelve months."

"Only someone with too much of someone else's money and not enough accountability for how it was being spent could come up with some of the zany projects the government paid for this year," states Coburn in the [report](#).

Coburn's research identifies federal funding for Swedish massages for rabbits at NIH and to teach monkeys how to play video games and gamble at the National Science Foundation. For purposes of this blog, I've attempted to highlight programs that contain some form of IT or federal contracting implications, but I encourage you to browse through the entire 110 page report if for nothing more than amusement and entertainment purposes.

State Department Tweets @ Terrorists – (State) \$3M: The State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) used a portion of its \$3 million budget to create the Think Again Turn Away Twitter account, which provides a counter to the tweets of extremists. Experts in the field of terrorism and extremism believe taxpayer money could be better spent on countering their efforts in other formats.

Facebook for Fossil Enthusiasts – (NSF) \$1.97M: A group of University of Florida researchers won a \$1.97 million NSF grant to create a "web-based education community that connects people with a shared interest in paleontology" where users will be able to input data and request information from one other.

Social Security IT Project Wastes Hundreds of Millions – (SSA) \$288M: SSA's project to update their system for tracking disability claims is five years into development and is still two to two-and-a-half years from completion with nearly \$300 million already wasted and very limited functionality to date.

NASA Loses Hundreds of Electronic Devices Each Month – (NASA) \$1.1M: NASA has been issuing smartphones, tablets, and AirCards without keeping track of who has them or even if they are being used at all. Over 2,000 devices went unused for at least 7 months from 2013-2014. The estimated cost of the unused and lost devices is at least \$97,000 every month.

Identity Thieves Steal Billions Each Year with Bogus Tax Returns – (IRS) \$4.2B: Every year the IRS pays out billions of dollars in fraudulent refunds to clever criminals filing fake tax returns. The Treasury Inspector General predicts this number will only continue to grow, estimating the IRS could issue approximately \$21 billion in fraudulent tax refunds resulting from identity theft" over five years, an average of \$4.2 billion each year.

Coburn plans to retire, so this maybe the last wastebook report unless someone else picks up the torch.

Coburn states in the introduction, "What I have learned from these experiences is Washington will never change itself. But even if the politicians won't stop stupid spending, taxpayers always have the last word. As you read through the entries presented in this report, ask yourself: Is each of these a true national priority or could the money have been better spent on a more urgent need or not spent at all in order to reduce the burden of debt being left to be paid off by our children and grandchildren?"

The bottom line is that the federal government still has a long way to go in order to curb pet projects, wasteful spending, and fraud. Federal agencies perpetually will face tighter budgets while endeavoring to become more efficient and effective. In some cases, technology can help identify wasteful spending, and root out fraud and abuse. Agencies will continue to strive to improve operations, processes, and payment accuracy in order to save taxpayers' money, leaving the market ripe for continued contractor support, especially in the areas of financial management, payment accuracy, and fraud prevention.