



WASTE REPORT for April 18, 2016

Waste: A Documentary

Documentaries often give us insight into some subject with which we were previously not familiar. What you might also not be familiar with is how last year **Uncle Sam spent over \$2 million of your tax money to send filmmakers around the world showing their documentaries in the name of diplomacy.**¹

The American Film Showcase, a partnership between the University of Southern California and the U.S. Department of State (State) “highlights the value of film in fostering understanding and cooperation, dialogue and debate.”

According to the Showcase’s overview video, people’s perception of the U.S. is often drawn from blockbuster movies, said while panning past a *Captain America* shield. The Showcase aims to spread a more realistic view of America around the world, but also “[t]o **encourage American filmmakers and film experts to learn about life and culture in selected host countries.**” Thus, the taxpayer has paid to send these film-makers on 7-10 day trips to foreign countries, screening their and others’ works.

In fact, over four years, the Showcase has sent filmmakers to 73 countries “**reaching**” **roughly 25,000 people worldwide according to the programs figures.**² With approximately \$5 million in grants from State over that time, the **U.S. taxpayer is paying just over \$200 a person “reached” by film.**

To fund this project just this year would require the entire tax liability of 277 average American taxpayers.³ Of course, this year’s federal deficit, according to President Obama’s most recent budget, will be \$616 billion.⁴ Meaning instead, Uncle Sam is more likely borrowing money from countries like China, and you’re paying the [interest](#), to send filmmakers and their movies around the world.

So what kinds of movies reach people around the world, fostering healthy relationships? As you might or might not expect, there are films like ***Trash Dance*, which tells of a woman’s journey to choreograph sanitation workers and their equipment in a dance;** *Top Spin*, telling the tale of American teenagers’ quest to become table tennis champions; and *Spellbound*, a story about the U.S. National Spelling Bee.

Diplomacy in action!!!

¹ <https://www.usaspending.gov/transparency/Pages/TransactionDetails.aspx?RecordID=9D8B3111-B683-47D3-8956-EBF26950DBD1&AwardID=45574855&AwardType=G>

² <http://americanfilmshowcase.com/about/overview/>

³ FSO staff calculation using IRS data

⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2017/assets/tables.pdf>