The Festivus Report 2023

Happy Festivus!

How is 2023 already coming to a close? What a year it’s been. Twitter is now X, what we thought were UFOs were actually Chinese Spy Balloons, Barbie battled Oppenheimer at the box office, and a missing F-35 jet flew for over 60 miles without a pilot. 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 $30 trillion. Shockingly, in one short year, the career politicians and bureaucrats in Washington have managed to approach $34 trillion in debt, without so much as a second thought.

Who’s to blame for our crushing level of debt? Everybody. This year, members of both parties in Congress voted to raise the debt ceiling, which empowered the government to borrow an unlimited amount of money until 2024. As Congress spends to reward its favored industries and pet projects, the American taxpayers are forced to pay the price through record high inflation and crippling interest rates.

The same big spenders teamed up, yet again, to continue sending Americans’ hard-earned money to foreign countries and funding endless wars, all while ignoring our porous southern border.

And our mountain of debt will continue to pile ever higher. The Congressional Budget Office predicts we will add an average of $2 trillion in debt annually for the next decade. The U.S. government will add over $5 billion of debt every single day for the next ten years. We borrow over $200 million every hour, we borrow $3 million every minute, and we borrow $60,000 every second.

This year, I am highlighting a whopping ~$900,000,000,000 of waste, including an NIH grant to study Russian cats walking on a treadmill, Barbies used as proof of ID for receiving COVID Paycheck Protection Program funds, $6 million to promote tourism in Egypt, and $200 million to ‘struggling artists’ like Post Malone, Chris Brown, and Lil Wayne. No matter how much money the government has already wasted, politicians keep demanding even more.

As always, taking 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 it’s time to hear all about them!
The Waste of 2023

- Barbie Doll Photo Used to Get COVID PPP Funds..........................................................\textit{portion of $800,000,000,000}
- In the RED: Interest on Our National Debt is Expensive ..............................................\$659,000,000,000
- Dr. Fauci’s Monkey Business on NIH’s “Monkey Island”..............................................\$33,200,000
- USAID Fund to Boost Egyptian Tourism........................................................................\$6,000,000
- USDA’s Cutting-Edge Research: Walking Dogs in the Summer.....................................\textit{Unknown}
- DHS Training Employees to Be Their “Authentic & Best Selves”..................................\textit{Unknown}
- Russian Cats-On-A-Treadmill Studies Funded by NIH..................................................\textit{portion of $2,700,000}
- The Government Pays Dead People ... Again!.................................................................\$38,000,000
- DOD’s Lobster Tank........................................................................................................\$8,395
- How to Ruin Expensive Military Equipment Part 1: Engines.........................................\$89,000,000
- How to Ruin Expensive Military Equipment Part 2: Transmissions..............................\$12,600,000
- How to Ruin Expensive Military Equipment Part 3: Tank Treads...................................\$68,000,000
- “Real Fake”: DHS’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Graphic Novel About Disinformation......................\textit{Unknown}
- DHS’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} Graphic Novel: COVID Disinformation........................................\textit{Unknown}
- NIH’s Meth-Head Monkeys............................................................................................\textit{portion of $12,000,000}
- Treasury’s Pot of Cash for Political Campaigns.........................................................\$400,000,000
- NIH’s Monkey Casino: Gambling for Drinking Water....................................................\textit{portion of $3,700,000}
- SBA’s Ticket to Backstage...............................................................................................\$200,000,000
- Studying COVID-19 “Misinformation” On Social Media In Black & Rural Communities...\$3,800,000
- Dr. Fauci’s Transgender Monkey Study........................................................................\$477,121
- Whoopsie: Improper Federal Payments.........................................................................\$236,000,000,000
- FLASHBACK: The Government Likes Its Gambling Monkeys........................................\$171,000

\textbf{Taxpayer Dollars Wasted:} \textbf{~$900 Billion}
Barbie Doll Photo Used to Get COVID PPP Funds

The faces of Barbie’s Dream World played a role in the fiscal nightmare that was COVID-19 spending. Government spending was already out of control when Congress approved $800 billion in COVID Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) funds. As federal agencies hustled to get the funds out quickly, it came as no surprise when swindlers rushed to line up for their cut of the COVID cash.

Some of us saw the writing on the wall and predicted that shutting down our economy and printing more money to pay the nation to stay home from work would be a fiscal disaster. But using Barbie’s face as proof of identity to steal taxpayer dollars was not on my COVID waste bingo card.

What was supposed to be an AI system to verify proof of identity, quickly exposed the stupidity of the program. The verification system did not catch the images of dolls uploaded by fraudsters. Somehow the Small Business Administration carelessly approved the applicants from Toyland and sent out improper COVID-19 PPP payments.

In the RED: $659 Billion for Interest on Our National Debt; Borrowing to Spend Money We Don’t Have is Expensive!

It doesn’t take a genius to predict the dangers that come with spending money that the government just doesn’t have. When the government overspent by $1.7 trillion in FY2023, we were left with a whopping $659 billion in interest payments.

You read that right. In Fiscal Year 2023, the U.S. Department of the Treasury spent $659 billion just to pay the interest on the national debt. Because we don’t have the funds to pay that, we have to borrow it — a large portion from China. We borrow from China to pay the interest on funds we couldn’t afford to spend in the first place.

My 2022 Festivus Report noted the Department of the Treasury spent $475 billion on interest payments in fiscal year 2022. When the national debt jumped even higher this year, the interest payment went up $184 billion.

Apparently, robbing Peter to pay Paul is not a sound fiscal strategy.

Dr. Fauci’s Monkey Business: $33.2 Million to Run NIH’s “Monkey Island”

What’s known to South Carolina locals as “Monkey Island” is Dr. Fauci’s ~3,000-monkey colony, raised on a state-owned island. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) signed a $33.2 million contract with a local business to house, feed, and care for these monkeys before they’re shipped to research labs around the country.

The federal government established the colony in the late 1970s, though the multi-million dollar contract to care for the monkeys changed hands a few times. NIH also paid millions to a large pharmaceutical company to maintain Dr. Fauci’s Monkey Island.

Monkey business is a big business.

$6 Million to Boost Egyptian Tourism? Talk about Foreign Aid Waste!

Care to float in a hot-air balloon around Egyptian ruins or travel down the Nile on a Royal Cleopatra Nile cruise? Maybe touring the Temple of Khnum, or seeing an 1897 oil press is more your style? If so, Esna, Egypt, might be the perfect spot for your next vacation.

I have nothing against tourism, but U.S. taxpayers should not be the ones funding a tourism-boosting program in Esna, Egypt.

Yet the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) approved spending $6 million to do just that: boost tourism in Egypt, which it promotes as a “value investment in sustainable integrated tourism.” USAID’s multi-million-dollar VISIT-Esna initiative will run through September 2024.

The U.S. has spent over $100 million on Egyptian tourism so far. What’s next – rebuilding the pyramids? Apparently, Congress and the agencies it funds think our treasury is a bottomless pit.

When you walk outside in the summer, you get hot. When Labrador retrievers are walked outside in the summer, they also get hot.

Getting hot while walking outside in the heat might be obvious to you, but the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) allocated “cutting-edge” research funding to support a summer study that walked 16 dogs—of two different colors — and measured their rectal temperatures.

Researchers found the Labradors’ fur color did not affect their body temperatures after a hot summer’s walk. That’s it. That’s the taxpayer-funded, cutting-edge study.

The Agricultural Research Service at the USDA, which funded the study at Southern Illinois University, gets $1.7 billion a year from Congress, but it’s unknown how much the hot dog study cost the taxpayer.

Perhaps taxpayers should have Congress put USDA on a tighter fiscal leash.

Sources: The White Coat Waste Project brought this study to my attention: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1558778821000393, “This study was partially supported by the USDA-ARS Biophotonics (Grant # 58-6402-3-018)”; https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/theses/2520/; https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/639757v1.full; https://www.ars.usda.gov/about-ars/.
Department of Homeland Security: Training Employees To Be Their “Authentic & Best Selves”

One would think employees of the Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) would spend their time combatting cybersecurity breaches and doing other security-related tasks.

Think again. As part of a 5-year “diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA)” strategic plan, CISA employees gathered for a federally funded workshop, where attendees focused on “effective strategies to build and sustain psychological safety that allows individuals to show up to work as their authentic and best selves […]”

Ironically, the workshop coincided with CISA’s efforts to suppress protected speech on social media platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even I was censored at the behest of our government speech minders. And all while I thought I was being my best self.

After having their brain stems snipped, Russian cats were forced to walk on a treadmill in Russian labs. This is all thanks to U.S. taxpayers footing the bill.

Russian scientists, funded with your money, posted videos of their cat-walk studies, which showed shaved cats hooked up to electrodes and struggling to walk on a treadmill.

These cat-walks were part of a $2.7 million National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant given to a researcher at the Georgia Institute of Technology in the U.S. The Institute then sub granted the funds to researchers in St. Petersburg, Russia — a fact first uncovered by White Coat Waste Project in 2021.

U.S. officials testified that another $38 million in COVID payments — an average of $83,000 each — went to people Uncle Sam knew were dead. The figures came from the special task force Congress authorized to track COVID payments from the federal government. Specifically, $10 million was paid to individuals who were already dead on the date someone applied for funding. The government doled out $1.3 million of your money to 30 individuals who were dead for at least a year, in what fraud inspectors deemed one of the “particularly egregious examples.”

This was not the first time Uncle Sam tracked taxpayer funds to the mailboxes of the dead. By April 30, 2020, the U.S. Treasury’s Inspector General knew $1.4 billion (of $269 billion total) was sent out to more than one million Americans who filed taxes in previous years, and then died, yet still received checks intended as COVID stimulus payments.

Not all the funds were recovered, as dead people are notoriously bad about paying up.

We all know that the Department of Defense (DOD) makes purchases for military operations. One would imagine weapons, ammunition, and tanks might be among those purchased items, but according to USASpending.gov, they aren’t the kind of tanks you’re thinking of!

The DOD paid $8,395 for a “Lobster Tank” purchased from a restaurant equipment company in Springfield, Virginia. I understand military personnel need to eat, but does the DOD really need a Lobster Tank? I think we can all agree these aren’t the tanks Americans thought their tax dollars were funding.

“I know, let’s store your vehicle engine outside,” said no auto mechanic ever.

But that’s just where the U.S. Army officials “improperly stored 80 gas turbine engines” valued at $89.16 million.

Each of the $1.1 million engines were improperly stored for three years!

Apparently, the code to properly store the engines was missing upon their arrival, so, instead of putting the engines in a covered shed they were left outside. At a million dollars an engine, why couldn’t someone just call and ask for the code?

How much does something have to be worth for the U.S. Army to store it properly? Evidently more than $12.6 million.

This time, the Department of Defense (DOD) Inspector General (IG) found the U.S. Army “improperly stored 135 hydraulic transmissions (NIIN 14131885), valued at $12.60 million, outside.” Despite the requirement to be stored in a shed, over 1,000 officials told the IG they simply didn’t have room in the shed.

Apparently, the natural next step is to store them in leaky and improperly maintained long-life reusable containers (LLRCs). It was in the outside LLRCs, that inspectors found transmissions stored at excessive humidity levels and among standing water and oil.

‘Don’t leave it out in the rain’ seems like simple and basic training.

How to Ruin Millions of Dollars in Military Equipment
Part 3: $68 Million Worth of Military Tank & Vehicle Treads

The third and final example (until next year) of the Department of Defense (DOD) ruining expensive military equipment, revolves around military tanks and tank treads.

The DOD Inspector General (IG) cataloged “117,534 vehicular track shoes” valued at $68.29 million left outside in the open air. They were not covered or stored properly at all. The IG said over 1,000 military officials did not follow the military’s own guidance on storage.

The Bradley, Stryker, and Abrams-using soldiers, along with the taxpayers that fund their vehicles, deserve better. At least we know they’ll be in real military vehicles, not lobster tanks!

“Real Fake”: DHS’s Graphic Novel About Disinformation

The Cybersecurity Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agency that made itself the arbiter of “misinformation” during the COVID pandemic, created a series of graphic novels, called the “Resilience Series,” to help educate the public about misinformation. There is nothing comical about wasting taxpayer money to justify censorship of constitutionally protected speech.

The first in the series was called “Real Fake” and featured a foreign operation created to spread misinformation about a U.S. Senator and impact U.S. elections.

Misinformation is not a joke, but it is especially not funny when bureaucrats in the federal government are determining what is and isn’t considered misinformation, all under the guise of protecting Americans.

DC Comics won’t be adding these taxpayer-funded comic books from America’s Cyber Defense Agency (CISA) to their repertoire anytime soon.

Using the tired old trope that, “disinformation campaigns are a direct threat to our democracy,” CISA spent time and money telling people what to believe about COVID vaccines and helping to suppress debate and discussion about the new vaccine technology and its potential side effects.

CISA’s latest graphic novel even dips into the conspiracy theory that Russia created a “disinformation pandemic” around COVID. In fact, few did more to cause mistrust than the U.S. government and its cover-up experts like Dr. Fauci, who, we now know, pushed disinformation on mask and vaccine efficacy, while obfuscating our government’s involvement with dangerous gain-of-function coronavirus research.

The First Amendment is kryptonite for our government censors.

NIH’s Meth-Head Monkeys

National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded researchers at the University of Mississippi Medical Center gave lab monkeys meth in the morning and tracked the monkeys’ sleep habits through implanted wire leads running “subcutaneously from the head incision to the eye orbit, exiting the eye orbit from underneath the upper eyelid.”

The study was funded by portions of four NIH grants and brought to my attention by the White Coat Waste Project.

Over 100,000 Americans die of meth overdoses each year as these dangerous drugs pour across our open borders. Our nation’s first responders and families across the country struggle every day to fight this drug epidemic, and yet NIH approved a portion of approximately $12 million in NIH grants to test the sleep habits of monkeys given meth in the morning?

Sources: [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9021839/#S2title](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9021839/#S2title), This work was supported by the National Institutes of Health (DA011792, DA043204, DA046778, and DA049886); [https://reporter.nih.gov/search/E0aP9k_gFUuBzchajum1MA/project-details/10597619](https://reporter.nih.gov/search/E0aP9k_gFUuBzchajum1MA/project-details/10597619); [https://reporter.nih.gov/search/VEFMA-IDBEGDk237GNOUха/project-details/10663558](https://reporter.nih.gov/search/VEFMA-IDBEGDk237GNOUха/project-details/10663558); [https://reporter.nih.gov/search/XSAD_OJAP0aVUb1fSlhoA/project-details/10651899](https://reporter.nih.gov/search/XSAD_OJAP0aVUb1fSlhoA/project-details/10651899); [https://reporter.nih.gov/search/E0aP9k_gFUuBzchajum1MA/project-details/10597619](https://reporter.nih.gov/search/E0aP9k_gFUuBzchajum1MA/project-details/10597619); [https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates](https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates).
$400 Million Pot of Cash for Political Campaigns

Every year, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) reroutes incoming tax payments to a fund set aside for U.S. presidential campaigns. The account is funded by a $3 IRS tax return check box. Since 2008, no major political party’s candidate for president has accepted the funds. As of November 1, 2023: $400.6 million sat unused in the Presidential Election Campaign Fund Account.

Why do we provide unused and unnecessary welfare for politicians and their presidential campaigns? It’s time to scrap the wasteful Presidential Election Campaign check off program.

NIH’s Monkey Casino: Gambling for Drinking Water

Two laboratory monkeys at the University of Minnesota faced high stakes as their access to drinking water hung in the balance, contingent upon their willingness to embrace what researchers termed "gambling."

To study the region of the brain that impacts risk-taking choices, parts of monkeys’ skulls were removed and their brains were injected with tracers and monitored as they gambled between two different options presented to them on two screens.

Test subjects were given a low-risk, low reward choice and a high-risk, high reward option, with the monkeys choosing risk over reward more than 70% of the time.

The study—funded under an NIH National Institute of Mental Health $1.9 million grant and an NIH National Institute of Drug Abuse $1.8 million grant—gambled that this monkey study was a good use of taxpayer funds.

I’m not a gambling man, but I’d bet, with confidence, that the American taxpayers disagree.

Behavior in the gambling task

Two subjects combined. We examined the behavior of two male macaque subjects (Macaca mulatta, subjects P and S) performing a well-studied two-option risky choice task (Strait et al., 2014). The data and results we present here have not been published before, but qualitatively replicate our past findings. Specifically, behavioral data indicate that subjects understood the key elements of the task. They preferred offers with the larger expected value on 73.10% of the trials (for individual subjects, see below).

This proportion is significantly higher than expected by chance (p<0.001, binomial test). It is also

Sources: The White Coat Waste Project brought this study to my attention: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9232485/, “This research was supported by NIH grants R01 DA038106 (to B.Y.H.), R01 MH 118257 (to S.R.H.)”; https://static-content.springer.com/esm/art%3A10.1038%2Fs41467-022-31273-9/MediaObjects/41467_2022_31273_MOESM1_ESM.pdf; https://reporter.nih.gov/search/NqHHUJgemyKW_som5xUphfA/projects; https://reporter.nih.gov/search/11mxubF2ck2L9agR9Dz5ug/projects; (image) https://www.ebay.com/itm/193862059679.
SBA’s $200 Million Ticket to Backstage

When local concert venues and family-owned theaters were forced to shut down during the pandemic, distributing financial relief was left to the Small Business Administration (SBA). The Shuttered Venue Operators Grant program was supposed to provide a lifeline to small entertainment businesses nationwide.

Sadly, but not surprisingly, SBA failed to deliver. Business Insider identified dozens of famous music artists and their touring companies that received over $200 million through the program.

So-called “small business owners,” such as Post Malone, Lil Wayne, Chris Brown, and Smashing Pumpkins, received up to $10 million each. Even Nickelback received $2 million. While some may claim these funds were used to keep supporting staff, artists were not required to do so, and we have no way of determining how these blank checks were used.

These multi-millionaire musicians were cashing checks, instead of the intended recipients: America’s small businesses.

Throughout the pandemic the National Institutes of Health (NIH) — an agency that suppressed its own involvement in funding dangerous coronavirus research — labeled any COVID dissent as misinformation.

NIH is now specifically targeting the COVID opinions of black and rural communities. A $3.8 million University of Pennsylvania study is investigating “COVID-19 misinformation exposure on social media among Black and Rural communities” to help “identify and combat misinformation.” In this study, researchers examine social media posts “with a specific lens on race” and location.

When the study began in September 2022, much of what the government and social media called COVID “misinformation” (relating to masks, vaccine efficacy, and the virus’ origins) is what is simply called “true” this year.

Will truth complicate their 5-year COVID “misinformation” study?

Dr. Fauci’s $477,121 Transgender Monkey Study

Under Dr. Fauci, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) was back in the business of wasting your money and torturing animals. This time, instead of tormenting puppies with ravenous sandflies, a Florida lab is trying to feminize male monkeys. That’s right, the NIAID is using $477,121 of your tax dollars to fund the forced feminization of male rhesus macaques.

Utilizing taxpayer funds from NIAID, a Florida lab set out to examine what would happen if female hormones were given to male monkeys. After receiving the hormones, biopsies from the force-feminized, male monkeys were tested to see if they were more susceptible to HIV.

The lab worked to make male lab monkeys “transgender” to address “social injustices” suffered by “transgender persons” such as “transgender women (TGW)-individuals who were assigned a male set at birth but express their gender along a female spectrum.”

Critics note that monkeys themselves are not susceptible to HIV, and argue injecting the male monkeys with female hormones is unlikely to yield relevant information or to help humans.

Can you imagine having a line item in your personal checkbook for “improper payments?”

This year, the Biden Administration sent out a whopping $236 billion in inaccurate checks, otherwise known as “improper payments.” Federal law defines the term as payments made by the government to the wrong person, in the wrong amount, or for the wrong reason.

FY2023’s whoopsies were down only slightly from FY2022’s $247 billion in improper payments, which came to $675 million a day.

Some of the most alarming improper payments are below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal Program</th>
<th>Improper FY23 Payments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medicaid</td>
<td>$50.332 Billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance</td>
<td>$43.551 Billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned Income Tax Credits</td>
<td>$21.881 Billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Loan Guaranty Purchases</td>
<td>$4.066 Billion</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Opportunity Tax Credits</td>
<td>$1.651 Billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA Purchasing Long Term Services and Supports</td>
<td>$1.418 Billion</td>
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2021 saw a total of $281 billion in improper payments, largely due to massive COVID overpayments.

$171,000 Flashback: The Government Likes Its Gambling Monkeys

In 2014, the late Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK), published his annual WasteBook exposing, among other waste, a $171,000 National Science Foundation study making monkeys gamble. As I have highlighted, nine years later, the NIH still is actively studying the gambling choices of monkeys. Can we get out of the monkey gambling business already?!

Sources:
- https://coburn.library.okstate.edu/pdf/Wastebook%202014%20FINAL%208.27.2014741.pdf;