



Wastebook 2013

United States Government US Senate, Senator Tom Coburn M.D.

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Confronted with self-imposed budget cuts necessary to trim years of trillion dollar shortfalls, Washington protested that it could not live within its means. It attempted to take hostage the symbols of America to exact ransom from taxpayers. Public tours of the White House were canceled and Medicare payments for seniors' health care were cut. While the President and his cabinet issued dire warnings about the cataclysmic impacts of sequestration, taxpayers were not alerted to all of the waste being spared from the budget axe. DOD developed a plan this year to constrain pay and benefits for our brave men and women in uniform, who risk their lives to protect us, while at the same time continuing to pay the salary and other government benefits for the Fort Hood shooter, responsible for the worst terrorist attack on American soil since 9- 11. DOD grounded the Air Force Thunderbirds and Navy Blue Angels, yet still spent \$432 million to construct aircraft they never intend to fly. The Army National Guard spent \$10 million on Superman movie tie-ins while plans were being made to cut the strength of the Guard by 8,000 soldiers, the real supermen and women who fight for truth, justice and the American way. As the Smithsonian was closing exhibits at its world renowned museums, the federal government was funding the creation of "play zones" at the National Museum of Play, an inventory of toys at the Denver Museum of Miniatures, Dolls and Toys, and a website celebrating romance novels. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) cut housing assistance for the disabled elderly while subsidizing thousands of risky mortgages, including more than 100 homes (that cost in excess of half-a-million dollars each) within walking distance of the ocean in Hawaii. And while nutrition assistance was being reduced for many needy families, USDA was spending money on celebrity chef cooks-offs and running up the taxpayer tab on Bloody Marys, sweet potato vodka, and red wine tastings from here to China. NASA ultimately paid more than 17,700 employees—97 percent of its staff— to do nothing for 16 days as a result of the shutdown. These hardworking employees, caught in factors outside of their control, should not be confused with the "pillonauts" the space agency hired to lie around in bed and do nothing for 70 days. Even the government shutdown could not shut down Obamacare, but the failure of its \$319 million website nearly did. 10 Millions of dollars more were spent to urge taxpayers to visit the website that did not work—at whiskey festivals and on TV with ads featuring Elvis impersonators. Yet, even the hundreds of thousands who had their plans canceled struggled to sign up for the plans they did not want in the first place. At least one dog was able to enroll, however. And just days before the impending shutdown, when much of Washington was bracing for a protracted closure of most government offices and activities, USDA decided to celebrate Christmas early by funding six Christmas trees projects and—in the spirit of holiday cheer—35 different wine initiatives, including the creation of two smart phone apps to help "navigate to the next winery." These are only a few of the 100 examples of government mismanagement and stupidity included in Wastebook 2013. Collectively these cost nearly \$30 billion in a year when Washington would have you believe everything that could be done has been done to control unnecessary spending. Had just these 100 been eliminated, the sequester amount would have been reduced nearly a third without any noticeable disruption. As you glance at each of the entries presented in this report, place your personal political persuasion aside and ask yourself: Do each of these represent a real national priority that should be spared from budget cuts or are these excesses that should have been eliminated in order to spare deeper cuts to those services and missions that should be performed by the federal government?

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