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United States Senate

COMMITTEES
ARMED SERVICES
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION
AND FORESTRY
SMALL BUSINESS
AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

November 25, 2024

Mr. Elon Musk and Mr. Vivek Ramaswamy
Co-Chairmen
Department of Government Efficiency

Dear Mr. Musk and Mr. Ramaswamy,

Thank you for stepping up to take on the challenge of saving taxpayers from Washington's out-of-control spending that put our nation \$36 trillion in debt. Your mission could not be more urgent, and there's no team better suited to lead the effort.

My fellow Iowans sent me to the Senate ten years ago to make the porkers squeal. It's been a very lonely fight. In this era of political polarization, Democrats and Republicans always come together in agreement over one issue: living high off the hog.

When faced with proposals to trim the fat from Washington's budget, members of Congress from both parties act like Goldilocks. It's too little or too big, always too hard, and never just right. But the real "make-believe" of this fairy tale is that it's impossible to reduce Washington's budget without causing pain. Most Americans aren't even benefitting in any meaningful way from hundreds of billions of dollars being wasted.

While you're seeking "super high-IQ small-government revolutionaries" for "unglamorous cost-cutting," all that's really needed is a little common sense. If you can't find waste in Washington, there can only be one reason: you didn't look.

With [\\$3 billion](#) of interest being added to our national debt every day, the longer we delay tackling the problem, the further away the finish line gets.

To give you a head start, here are a trillion dollars' worth of ideas for trimming the fat and reducing red ink:

Vacant Buildings

Maintaining and leasing government office buildings costs [\\$8 billion every year](#). Another \$7.7 billion is spent for the energy to keep them running. Yet, with the federal workforce still largely working from home, not a single headquarters of a major government agency or department in the nation's capital [is even half full](#). Billions more are being spent buying [brand new furnishings for the abandoned offices](#). The government also owns [7,697 vacant buildings and another 2,265 that are partially empty](#). An additional \$14 million is being spent [leasing underutilized space](#) and

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nearly \$1 million more for its maintenance. Consolidating office space reduces costs and auctioning off unneeded properties brings in revenues.

Audit the IRS

Americans are paying the salaries and benefits for thousands of federal employees who aren't paying their own taxes. I audited the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and found more than [5,800 employees and contractors of the tax collection agency owe almost \\$50 million](#). As a result, many are now in payment plans, but 860 still haven't paid their overdue taxes. Tax evasion isn't just a problem at the IRS either. Government-wide, there are [nearly 150,000 tax cheats owing \\$1.5 billion](#) in unpaid taxes.

Biden's Billion Dollar Boondoggles

President Biden's so-called infrastructure program provided \$7.5 billion to build a nationwide network of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations and \$42 billion to expand broadband. Three years later, just [17 EV stations are completed](#) and [not a single person](#)—not one—has been connected to the internet yet. It's time to pull the plug.

The Biden administration also paid [hundreds of billions of COVID relief dollars](#) to fraudsters. A U.S. attorney calls it "[the biggest fraud in a generation](#)." Some swindlers who uploaded [pictures of Barbie dolls as photo identification](#) on the applications were even approved to receive money. But the Biden administration is being lax recollecting the cash and time is running out. The Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery investigating the gift expires in March, unless Congress extends its mission until every penny is returned.

Golden State Gravy Trains Taking Taxpayers for a Ride

Just three California gravy trains are on track to burn through billions of dollars:

- The California High-Speed Train is costing about [\\$1.8 million a day](#) to build and won't be completed for another decade. The current cost estimate to complete the project is [\\$128 billion](#)—nearly \$100 billion more than the original price tag! President Trump previously [canceled](#) federal funding for the project, but President Biden [restored the money](#).
- The price tag of Nancy Pelosi's six-mile subway extension from San Francisco to Silicon Valley is [\\$9.3 billion](#), more than \$1.5 billion per mile.
- The 1.3-mile extension of San Francisco's Caltrain rail service is [one of the costliest transit projects in the world](#) with a price tag of \$6.7 billion, or \$5.15 billion per mile.

Going a billion dollars over budget isn't a rounding error, it's a train wreck.

Christmas in September

In Washington, Christmas comes in September when binge buying bureaucrats go hog wild fulfilling their own wish lists. That's because the federal government's authority to spend money left over at the end of a fiscal year expires at midnight on September 30. In the rush to use it before they lose it, \$53 billion was recently spent in a single week! The September spending sprees of the past included impulse purchases on [\\$4.6 million of lobster tail and crab and \\$2.1 million for games and toys, including nearly \\$12,000 for a foosball table](#). For the sake of taxpayers, DOGE needs to be the Grinch.

Welfare for Politicians

The Presidential Election Campaign Fund provides welfare checks for politicians with presidential aspirations. It hasn't supported a winning candidate in two decades. This year the [program paid](#) out more than \$1 million to Mike Pence's campaign and \$380,000 to Green Party candidate Jill Stein. More than \$16.6 million is currently available for funding the future aspirations of fringe candidates destined for failure.

Bad Pennies

The government is losing money making money, [paying more than three cents to produce a penny and more than 11 cents for a nickel](#). That makes no *cents* when simply changing the composition of the coins could save [more than \\$50 million a year](#).

Trillion Dollar Secret Slush Funds

This past year, Biden's bureaucrats claimed the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Small Business Administration ran out of money needed to assist veterans and pay for emergency disaster recovery efforts. Yet, Washington always finds money when it comes to paying for pet projects, and some accounts are flush with cash. There's still [billions of dollars of unspent COVID relief dollars](#), for example. Most of us feel lucky when we find a \$20 bill in our pocket or some change in the couch. Well, Washington ended the last fiscal year with *trillions of dollars left unspent*, [\\$1.6 trillion of which isn't even obligated for any specific purpose yet](#). With trillions of dollars stashed away in secret slush funds, why is Washington borrowing any more money?

Bogus Bonuses

Federal employees and government contractors are being rewarded with financial bonuses for poor performance resulting in delays and cost overruns.

The Pentagon is paying [millions of dollars in unearned bonuses](#), including [\\$10.6 million](#) to a contractor that created "a life and safety concern" for airmen by failing to provide the necessary parts for jets.

The VA misspent [\\$10.8 million on bonuses for the department's senior execs](#) from the *PACT Act*, passed to care for veterans exposed to toxic substances. As a result of the VA's mismanagement, [the program went bankrupt](#), forcing Congress to pass an emergency bailout bill.

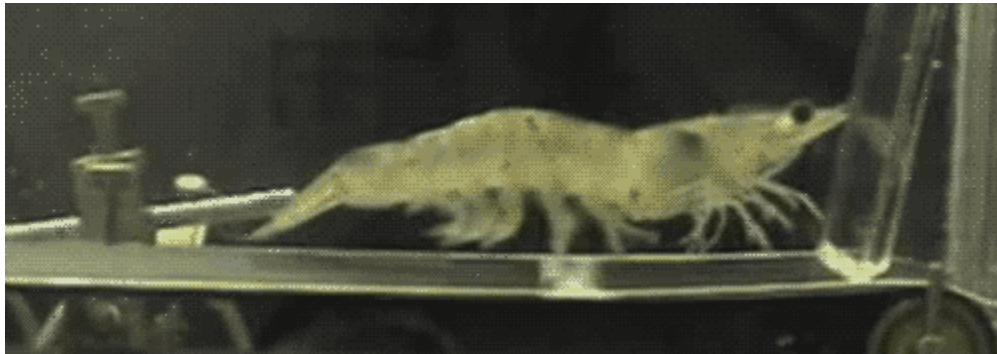
NASA is paying out-of-this-world [bonuses totaling more than \\$500 million](#) to the contractors of the next manned moon mission, which is billions of dollars over budget and years behind schedule as a result of [poor performance](#). Houston, we have a problem. Taxpayers were promised the moon but are instead getting stuck with a "moondoggle."

Silly Science

Remember when America could actually land a man on the moon? Most Americans weren't even born when the last astronaut stepped foot on the moon. Today, we're spending billions on science and NASA can't even return our astronauts trapped on the International Space Station to Earth. American science is unmatched. We transformed the world with the creation of the internet, and SpaceX is aiming beyond the moon. The question is what are we learning from the billions of taxpayer dollars Washington is spending on research and development?

The National Science Foundation is discovering the answers to questions like:

- How fast can a shrimp run on a treadmill? ([66 feet per minute](#))

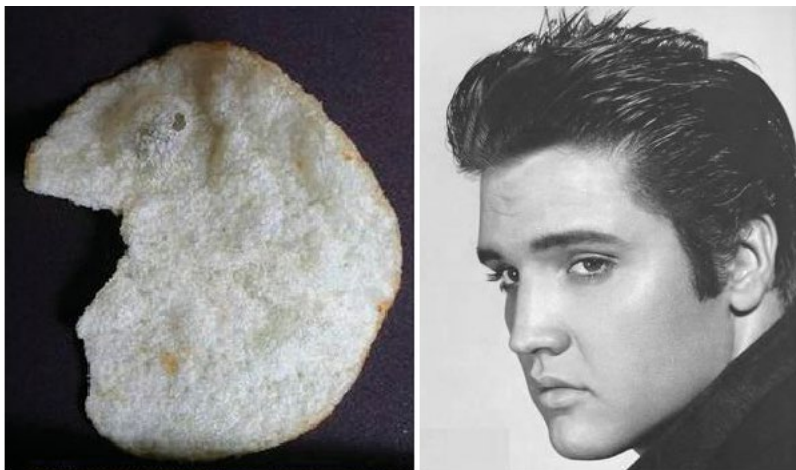


- Where does it hurt the most to be stung by a bee? ([in the nostril](#))
- What were viewers' facial reactions to the Trump/Clinton presidential debate? ([men looked angry and women appeared sad, especially when Clinton spoke](#))
- Which tastes better, water from a bottle or out of the toilet? ([both were rated about the same](#))
- Does recycling make men seem less manly? ([yes](#))
- How long does it take for a panda to poop? ([about 12 seconds](#))

- What word are Republican members of Congress more likely to tweet than Democrats? ([freedom](#))
- Can elephants solve puzzles? ([yes](#))

Not to be outdone, the National Institutes of Health spent tax dollars researching:

- To live a longer, healthier life, what political party should you join? ([Republican](#))
- Are pampered cats less likely to poop outside the litterbox? ([yes](#))
- Is pizza as addictive as drugs? ([yes](#))
- Do pigeons gamble? ([you bet](#))
- Does this sour cream and onion flavored potato chip look like Elvis? ([yes](#), but judge for yourself)



These might be fun to ask contestants on a game show, but the real question is: why are taxpayers supporting any of these studies?

Unemployment for Millionaires

Nearly 15,000 millionaires [collect \\$213.3 million in unemployment payments](#) in a single year. An [old regulation left over from the Great Society-era](#) requires the benefits be made available when someone loses a job, even if the recipient is still making a million dollars or more in other income. Most of the hardworking Americans picking up the costs aren't bringing home anywhere near that amount, even if they're working two jobs. The million-dollar question is: why is Washington forcing middle class Americans to finance the lifestyles of jobless millionaires?

Government Swag

Federal agencies collectively spend \$1.5 billion every year on [public relations and propaganda](#). This includes koozies, key chains, coloring books, snuggies, and [costumed mascots](#). Let's bag the swag.

Every Cloud Has a Silver Lining

[Consolidating agencies' cloud computing software licenses](#) could save [\\$750 million every year](#).

China's Mad Scientists

The entire world knows Dr. Fauci funded risky research on coronaviruses in China's Wuhan Institute of Virology with taxpayer dollars. [My investigations discovered millions more](#) sent to other institutions and labs in the communist country for secretive risky research.

United Nations Overpayments

The United Nations (U.N.) charges the U.S. [higher membership dues than any other country](#) and then Washington voluntarily contributes [\\$15 billion in additional contributions](#). U.N. staff helped plan and execute Hamas' terrorist attack on Israel in which American citizens were murdered and taken hostage. And a [2024 U.N. migrant plan](#) promotes cash handouts for migrants to cover travel expenses and includes a map with a red line leading right to the U.S. border. Our tax dollars to the U.N. are [subsidizing threats](#) to our own national security!

Defenseless Spending

It's time to declare war on waste at Department of Defense (DoD). The Pentagon has never passed an audit and is unable to fully account for its budget. [By its own estimates](#), DoD wastes \$125 billion on bloated bureaucracy and inefficiency. DoD could save \$527 million just by streamlining the duplication and unnecessary overlap within its [storage and distribution centers](#). DoD overpayments are legendary and the department is still overpaying nearly [\\$1 million](#) for spare parts. This includes a [nearly 8,000 percent mark-up for a soap dispenser](#) than the shelf price and [\\$1,220 for a coffee cup](#).

Remove Ineligible Recipients of Federal Employees Health Benefits

The Federal Employees Health Benefits program is spending almost \$1 billion a year paying the bills of [individuals who aren't even eligible for the coverage](#). Over 12 years, the program covered more than \$100,000 in claims for just two ineligible enrollees.

Paid to Do Nothing

While millions of Americans are working two or more jobs to make ends meet, some federal employees aren't working at all. Dozens of Department of Energy employees with nothing to do spend the workday [napping or playing chess, dominoes, and cards](#). Hundreds of other federal

employees spend years with no work assignments while on [paid administrative leave](#), costing more than \$31 million in salary payments a year. Congress passed a law to fix this problem years ago, but it's [still not enacted](#). Put them to work or send them home for good!

Stop Giving Away the Farm

Your call for budget cutting crusaders asks for individuals willing to work 80+ hours a week. Those type of hours aren't unusual for our nation's farmers and ranchers. No one works harder and every single American depends on the fruits of their labors. So nothing bugs me more than when the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) gives away farm aid to pay for pet projects, like subsidizing [cricket farms](#) or [teaching pigs to play video games](#), that do nothing to support agriculture.

Snap Back Inaccurate SNAP Payments

Nearly \$1 billion of ineligible Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits are being paid *every month*, [according to USDA's own estimates](#). Tens of thousands of recipients enrolled in the program [do not even qualify for the assistance](#) and [double dippers are getting second helpings](#) from multiple states. Fixing these bureaucratic blunders would save more than \$10 billion a year.

Reducing Duplication and Improving Performance

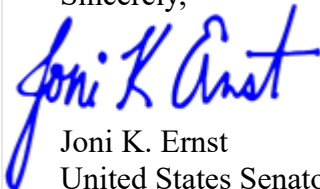
More than \$200 billion in financial benefits could be achieved by implementing the thousands of [outstanding recommendations](#) made by Congress' nonpartisan watchdog agency, the Government Accountability Office. We may not agree with every suggestion, but GAO always puts taxpayers' best interest first.

Require Commonsense Project Management Principles

For every \$1 billion Washington spends, [\\$102 million is wasted](#) as projects go [over budget, are delayed, or fail to meet projected goals](#). Implementing the most basic management systems—like establishing scopes and goals—could have saved taxpayers \$688.5 billion from [the \\$6.75 trillion the federal government spent this past year](#).

This is by no means an exhaustive list, and I will be providing many more recommendations soon. My team and I are ready to help you make some prime cuts.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator