Summertime Blues

Senator Tom Coburn, M.D.

Senator John McCain

100 stimulus projects that give taxpayers the blues

August 2010

coburn.senate.gov mccain.senate.gov

Cover Photo: Interior windows at the now-closed Coldwater Ridge Visitor Center overlooking Mount St. Helens. *Courtesy of the National Park Service.*

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Introduction

When Congress passed the $862 billion *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* in 2009, otherwise known as the stimulus bill, it passed with assurances that it would stem the loss of American jobs and keep the economy from floundering. As most can see, it hasn't.

Eighteen months since the law's passage, millions of jobs are still gone and the economy is as uncertain as ever. The only thing getting a boost is our national debt – the stimulus has helped push it 23 percent higher, to $13.2 trillion, a new record.

The dramatic increase in government spending has not shortened the nation's unemployment lines. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate in June 2010 was 9.5 percent, which is essentially the same as June of last year. Many economists are forecasting that the debt incurred to pay for these projects increases the risk of a greater economic downturn in the near future.

We owe it to all Americans that are paying taxes and struggling to find jobs, to rebuild our economy without doing additional harm, and to do it in a way that expands opportunities for future generations. Too many stimulus projects are failing to meet that goal.

As we detail in this third report in a series, some projects accomplish such questionable goals as putting in new windows at a vacant government building, replacing a new sidewalk with an even newer one, or money for a park that is only accessible by boat or plane.

Other projects that appear in the report may have merit, but are being mismanaged or were poorly planned. A biomass power plant was awarded hundreds of thousands of stimulus dollars, but may close in months. The same is true for a rail line to two professional sports stadiums— yet it is hundreds of millions of dollars over budget and only "shovel ready" because it was years behind schedule when funding came available.

Worst of all, some stimulus projects are actually *costing* jobs and hurting small businesses. By largely closing off access to local shops to build some of the stimulus projects, some business owners have had to cut staff hours, and let people go.

Washington should focus on re-igniting the unmatched power of the American entrepreneurial spirit by sweeping away government red tape, expanding markets for U.S. goods, making it easier for small businesses to compete in a global market, and reducing our national debt by eliminating wasteful Washington spending.

We owe it to every American to rebuild our economy without doing additional harm and in a manner that expands opportunities for future generations of Americans.

There is no question job creation should be a national priority, but torrential, misdirected government spending is not the way to do it. Generating record-breaking national debt is not an investment in our children's and grandchildren's future and will not lead to any long-term recovery.

Sincerely,

Tom Coburn, M.D.
U.S. Senator from Oklahoma

John McCain
U.S. Senator from Arizona

1. Forest Service to Replace Windows in Visitor Center Closed in 2007 (Amboy, WA) - $554,763

Despite having no plans to reopen a shuttered visitor center at Mount St. Helens in Washington state, the U.S. Forest Service is spending more than $554,000 to replace its windows.[1] One government official likened it to "keeping a vacant house in good repair," while another official noted that there is hope to find *some* purpose for the building in the future, whether as a hotel, science camp or restaurant.[2] Despite those efforts, there are no current plans to use the empty space.[3]

Spending $11.5 million in 1993, the Forest Service opened the Coldwater Ridge Visitor Center to provide visitors to Mount St. Helens a "sweeping view of the volcano"[4] through the center's soaring windows.[5] In 2007, however, the Forest Service closed down the visitor center after just 14 years in operation.[6] Former USDA official, Mark Rey, said at the time regarding Mount St. Helens, "we have more visitor center capacity than the public can reasonably use."[7]

Officials are hoping to maintain the facility so that another use can be found, such as a lodge or educational facility.[8] But the Forest Service has been criticized in the past for poor facilities management, especially within the Mount St. Helens National Monument, and there is no sign that an economically viable use for the center is close to being found.[9]

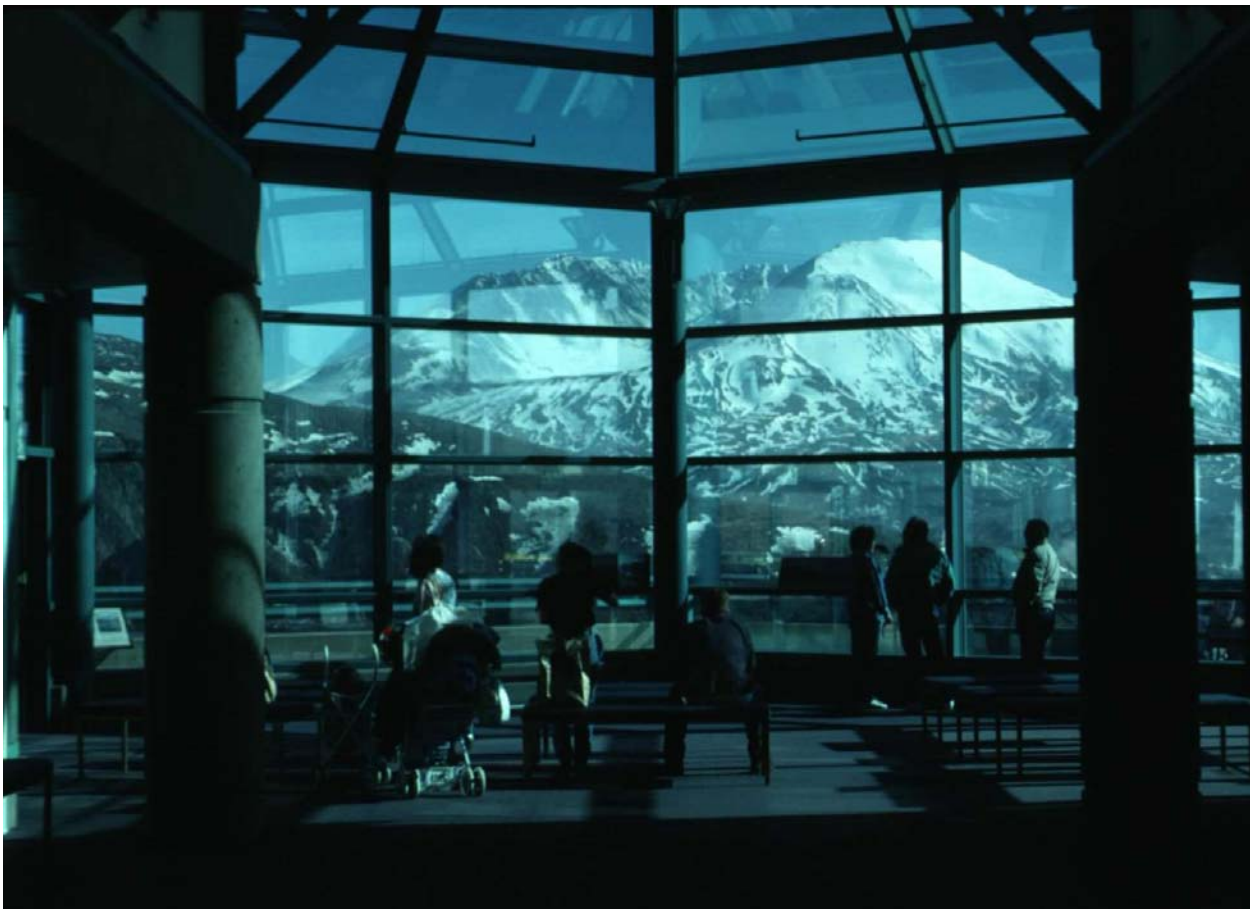


Photo courtesy of National Park Service

2. "Dance Draw" - Interactive Dance Software Development (Charlotte, NC) - $762,372

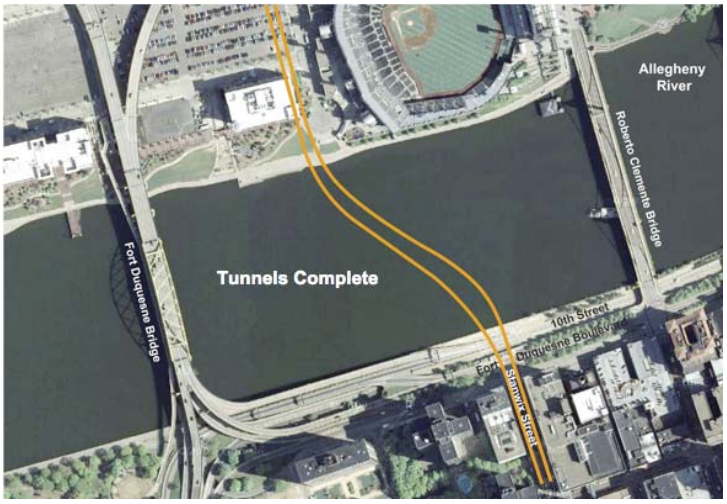
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte received more than $750,000 in stimulus funds to help develop a computerized choreography program that its creators believe could lead to a YouTube-like "Dance Tube" online application.[10] The grant says UNC-Charlotte will "define an evolving system that assists in the design and production of interactive dance performances with real-time audience interaction."[11]

A device is attached to each dancer, which will be recorded on video,[12] and their movements will be logged and analyzed. "This will allow choreographers to explore interactive dance without always having a full cast of dancers present," the grant states.[13] One day, dance performances may enjoy the popularity of YouTube hits like "double rainbow"[14] or "dramatic-look prairie dog."[15] States the grant: "The system will be extended into a Web-based 'Dance Tube' application that will allow the public to engage in interactive dance choreography."[16]

Administrative expenses are unusually high for this project, however. The project's lead researcher noted that the university is taking a 44 percent cut to cover "overhead expenses."[17]

3. North Shore Connector to Professional Sports Stadiums, Casino (Pittsburgh, PA) - $62 million

In February 2009, Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell called Pittsburgh's North Shore Connector "a tragic mistake,"[18] leaving taxpayers wondering why the project recently received a $62.5 million windfall from the U.S. Department of Transportation.[19] The project would allow the Port Authority of Allegheny County to extend the city's light rail under the Allegheny River to the new Rivers Casino,[20] as well as to its two professional sports arenas, PNC Park (home of the Pirates) and Heinz Field (home of the Steelers).[21] Unfortunately, the North Shore Connector has been plagued with problems since its inception, making it seem in this case that federal officials are throwing good money after bad.



Almost immediately, the North Shore Connector went over budget, blowing through cost projections at alarming rates. Original estimates put the final tally at approximately $390 million,[22] but quickly ballooned. Pennsylvania auditor Jack Wagner noted in a 2007 audit that, "In mid-2005, the [Federal Transit Administration] directed the Port Authority to solicit bids for construction of the [North Shore Connector] under the Allegheny River. Three firms responded - the lowest of the three bids was **24 percent higher** than the engineer's previous estimate" (original emphasis).[23]

To deal with the cost overruns, officials dropped plans to extend the rail to the convention center, reducing costs by $85 million.[24] Despite that, current estimates put the final cost at $529 million,[25] far exceeding the $435 million total estimated just last February.[26] Even after removing the convention center portion, project costs are more than a third greater than original estimates. State auditor Wagner blamed the cost overruns on "poor planning,"[27] adding later that it is "a waste of taxpayers' resources."[28]

The North Shore Connector has become a political hot potato. The *Pittsburgh Tribune Review* labeled the project a "tunnel to nowhere" and warned taxpayers years ago to expect "state, local and federal politicians to be there trying to take credit for the jobs and growth they've 'created'" by pouring tax dollars down this "runaway tunnel project."[29]

Federal money has covered the vast majority of costs, with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) agreeing to provide $348 million—nearly the full original cost—leaving state and local governments responsible for a small fraction.[30] Even with that level of assistance, the Port Authority still threatened to shut down the project due to the enormous cost overruns.[31]

With an infusion of more than $62 million in stimulus money, the project was taken off life support.[32] But whether it will provide a true benefit to the city is also a matter of controversy, given that it will primarily serve to bring commuters to sporting events and a casino. Rivers Casino, however, is struggling financially and may turn into a drag on the city's finances. Since the $780 million casino[33] opened in August 2009, Standard and Poor's rating service has downgraded the company three separate times, most recently to Selective Default, below speculative grade.[34] S&P projects that the casino may

not be able to pay its taxes or provide funding for the new hockey arena for the Pittsburgh Penguins, per an agreement with the city.[35]

Reflecting on the project, Governor Rendell commented bluntly, "I wish the project had never started. I think it's a huge – I won't say waste of money – but there's so many ways that money could have been applied to the transportation needs of this region in a more beneficial fashion."[36] Kathleen Connolly, local resident of suburban Pittsburgh, added, "They're not hiding the fact that it's for entertainment. It's not for commuter ease."[37]

4. FEMA Stalls Two Texas Fire Stations More Than a Year, Increases Costs (San Antonio, TX) - $7.3 million

The City of San Antonio is hoping that there aren't any fires for at least a year in the vicinity of two planned fire stations, thanks to "help" from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FEMA awarded $7.3 million to the city for construction of fire stations #50 and #51,[38] but the projects have become so mired in red tape it is not clear when they will be built.

Before the stimulus award, San Antonio was set to fully fund the two new stations with its own money, having even gone so far as to hire private contracting firm, Bartlett Cocke to begin work.[39] After the stimulus, however, the city found itself unexpectedly navigating complicated and expensive federal regulations, requiring environmental and historical considerations—all delaying the project significantly.[40] The result was an estimated $2.2 million overall increase in the cost of the two stations,[41] and Bartlett Cocke losing its contract, which in turn had to lay off employees.[42] In an email between employees of the City of San Antonio, they discussed the delays and that FEMA officials had informed them that "'shovel ready' was not a term in their lexicon."[43]

Carl Wedige

From: Rodney Hitzfelder
Sent: Monday, February 01, 2010 7:46 AM
To: Charles N. Hood
Cc: Carl Wedige; Erik Walsh
Subject: Stimulus Money Situation

Charles,

I didn't get a chance to fill you in on the meeting with Erik, Carl, Betty and Debbie on Friday. It appears that our target to build 50 and 51 may be greatly impacted by federal requirements - up to an additional year delay. We found this out Thursday and I wanted Erik to know asap. Carl and I explained to him that a year is not a short delay, and that the new, displaced engine and truck company will cost us $2.6 million a year and provide little service to the target area. Addtionally, the 2nd TRT plan really doesn't work under these circumstances. We compared $2.6M to the grant for 51's and decided that we are not coming out ahead waiting a whole year. Complaints will come from FF's, Union, residents, council, etc. We don't feel 50's is the same situation since we are already providing service from a good temp location.

Discussion was had about:

1. Just keep going (not good).
2. Reject entire grant and seek shortfall funds.
3. Try to reject 51's funds only, and keep 50's funds. Seek shortfall funds.
4. Try to move 51's funds to another project in the near future.

The discussion Friday ended with the following scenarion:

1. Inform the appropriate council people and CM.
2. Erik will contact Intergovernmental Relations Dept. to advise them.
3. Contact Ciro Rodriquez (since he jumped on the Media announcement initially) and advise him that this timeline is not in line with our needs (maybe mayor contact or trip to DC). FEMA stated to me that "shovel ready" was not a term in their lexicon.
4. Plan trip to DC to personnaly contact congressional delegation by "chiefs in dress uniforms" to ask that Stimulus funds for #51 be separated from #50, and be moved to another project. We should consider either 27, 28 or maybe 52 (infill).

Let me know if you want to talk more on this. This info is close hold at this time.

RH

5. Abandoned Train Station Converted Into Museum (Glassboro, NJ) - $1.2 million[44]

Taxpayers may not be happy to learn that they are paying for one broken down train station twice. The Glassboro train station was built in 1860 and closed in 1971.[45] Unused for nearly 40 years, it now sits boarded up and riddled with graffiti. In 2002, the Borough of Glassboro, New Jersey received nearly a quarter of a million dollars from the U.S. Department of Transportation to purchase the train station from Conrail.[46] At that time, officials hoped to incorporate the station into the regional NJ Transit system. But those plans fell through, and since then local officials have been looking for a way to fund renovations to put the building to some use.[47]

After eight years of failure and further deterioration of the building, the effort has been saved only by the availability of federal stimulus dollars.[48] Local officials lobbied hard for additional stimulus money.[49] They are hoping to spend the more than $1 million for the project "interpreting local history in its proper setting and make it a museum, public meeting space and welcome center."[50]

Photo courtesy of johnreiser[51]

6. Ants Talk. Taxpayers Listen (San Francisco, CA) - $1.9 million

The California Academy of Sciences is receiving nearly $2 million to send researchers to the Southwest Indian Ocean Islands and east Africa, to capture, photograph, and analyze thousands of exotic ants.[52] The photographs of the ants – over 3,000 species' worth, according to the grant proposal – will be posted on AntWeb, a website devoted to organizing and displaying pictures and information on the world's thousands of ant species.[53]

The project's goals are, to the lay person, both laudable and arcane: In addition to "foster[ing]…a large pool of ant taxonomists," it also strives to document "the vast majority of ant species known from [Africa]."[54] "[Ants] give us back the most data on the environment than any other group. Their life cycle is shorter, they change very quickly," says the project's Principal Investigator in a promotional article on the Academy's website. "Everyone has run into ants . . . now we need to listen to them."[55]

7. Stimulus Project Threatens Pastor's House (Newark, OH) - $1.8 million

An Ohio road project received $1.8 million in stimulus funds,[56] despite the threat it poses to the residents of over two dozen homes next to it. Pastor Greg Sheets of Newark, Ohio's Truth Tabernacle [57] has already lost his front yard to the project, and could lose his entire home.[58]

The house – which has sheltered three generations of Sheetses – has suffered cracks in its foundation and damage to its front porch from the work, Sheets says.[59] His neighbors, some of whom have hired lawyers, have had windows break and walls crack as a result of the construction.[60]

Photo courtesy of Greg Sheets

In August 2009, the Newark City Council passed a resolution authorizing the "intent to appropriate" (read: "take"), through the use of eminent domain, the residence of Pastor Sheets to provide for the "health, safety and welfare of citizens of the city of Newark."[61]

Then in September, Pastor Sheets refused the city's offer of $25,600 for a portion of his land.[62] An independent appraisal of the property, found that the city appraisal was well below market value.[63] The plans called to use so much of his yard, the City offered to buy his front steps – for $750.[64]

"I have been appalled at the blatant disregard that the City has exhibited for my clients' safety,"[65] says Attorney Tonda Moore, who represents Sheets and his neighbors, Tammy and Kurt Camp. Equipment

has struck Pastor Sheets' home, and has damaged the Camp residence.[66] The city has the right to "take" the property, but Attorney Moore is fighting with the city to ensure that the residents are protected and that her clients are paid a fair value for the loss of their family homes.

Since the project began, the road has been completely torn up and construction work has occurred within three feet of Pastor Sheets' home.[67] An independent structural engineer found this to be worrisome. "The use of heavy equipment," near the walls of Pastor Sheets' house, "is a significant concern."[68] He recommended the road equipment stay 10 feet from his home, to which the city agreed.[69]

Despite this agreement, a massive crane hit Mr. Sheets' porch several times, causing substantial damage.[70] With the foundation and portions of his home cracking and crumbling, Pastor Sheets' legal representatives filed for and obtained a restraining order to keep the construction company from coming within 15 feet of his home until they came to an agreement with the city to move Pastor Sheets to another location.[71]

Pastor Sheets' neighbors, the Camp family, have had similar problems. Tammy Camp explains that "we've had our windows broken from the construction vibrations; we've had our walls cracked; we've had our television and computer blown up; we've had huge burst of construction dirt and dusts; and banging noises and shaking of our home."[72]

The Waterworks expansion is one of the city's largest stimulus projects, and would move the west portion of Waterworks Road to align with the intersection of Deo Drive.[73] While some think this will help them save a few minutes on their commute, some residents believe all the city did was shift traffic one block over to another intersection.[74]

According to the municipal government, the goal of the project is to improve safety along the road, and relieve congestion for the town's approximately 47,000 residents.[75] Pastor Sheets had struggled to understand why the street gets priority over his house. "My home was there before most of the roads were even developed in our area," Sheets said.[76]

"It felt like the completion of this project at any cost was more important than the value of one's quality of life or even life," reflects Sheets. "In the end, this experience has been horrible and I feel violated in the one place I should feel safe and that's my home."[77]

"The City's actions have caused my family a lot of stress and heartache which no verdict could ever really make us feel complete," Camp concurred.[78]

8. Old Abandoned Iron Furnace Gets Facelift after Money Squandered on Same Project Years Before (Fitchburg, KY) – $357,710

Once considered ahead of its time, the Fitchburg Furnace in Kentucky was abandoned after just five years in service—it then sat unused for nearly 140 more.[79] Now it is getting a $357,710 makeover to repair stonework on the old structure and allow historians to conduct research.[80] Much of the damage to the structure occurred more than half a century ago when a local moonshiner loaded the structure with dynamite and tried to blow it up.[81] In 2004, however, the federal government provided $661,000 for restoration of the building,[82] though "much of which was lost" due to "bad stewardship of money," according to Skip Johnson, current treasurer of the Friends of Fitchburg.[83]

The work was performed by the University of Kentucky's Center for Historic Architecture and Preservation (CHAP), which has since disbanded, but it did not accomplish much. Remarked Johnson, "They did stabilize that corner and put a roof on it, but that's about all there is to show for $670,000."[84] At one point, the director of CHAP asked the Forest Service to consider finding another contractor because it was "without staff suitable for overseeing the project."[85]

9. Power Plant Construction Won't Start for at Least Two Years (Kern County, CA) - $308 million

BP may have found itself staring down huge financial losses over the past several months, but executives can take solace knowing that a stimulus windfall will help offset them. On September 28, 2009, Hydrogen Energy California, LLC (HECA), owned largely by BP, was awarded $308 million[86] in stimulus funds to "generate more environmentally friendly electricity by capturing carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels." [87]

HECA is a joint venture of BP Alternative Energy North America and Rio Tinto subsidiaries.[88] Stimulus funds "enabled continued development of the HECA project which otherwise would have been cancelled."[89] Construction is not expected to begin until December 2011,[90] nearly three years after the passage of the *Recovery Act*, raising serious questions about whether it is anywhere near "shovel-ready."

The clean coal power plant would convert raw materials into a gas that would be scrubbed for pollutants like sulfur and carbon dioxide.[91] The leftover gas would be used to power turbines that create electricity.[92] Any leftover carbon dioxide would be transported via pipeline to the Elk Hills oil field approximately four miles away from the power plant for underground storage and enhanced oil recovery.[93] Originally, the project was to be located at BP's Carson refinery, but was moved to Occidental Petroleum's Elk Hills enhanced recovery site.[94] Notably, in 2005, the South Coast Air Quality Management District in California won a record $81 million settlement from BP, which regulators had "accused of illegally spewing toxic gases from its Carson refinery for nearly a decade."[95]

10. Town Replaces New Sidewalks With Newer Sidewalks That Lead to Ditch (Boynton, OK) - $89,298

People around Boynton, Oklahoma were left scratching their heads after the town was awarded nearly $90,000[96] to replace a quarter-mile stretch of sidewalk that was replaced only five years ago.[97]

One longtime resident of Boynton, Ray Allen, said the project "had been the talk of the town recently, and none of it positive," because it is "100 percent a waste of money."[98] Another resident, Mike Lance, noted that "the best indication of the absurdity of the project is what the contractor did with a section of sidewalk at the north end of town – one that fronts no homes or businesses, and leads directly into a ditch."[99] Officials with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation defended the project as necessary to bring the sidewalk into conformity with federal guidelines.[100]

Meanwhile, many local residents have focused on a more pressing financial problem—namely the possible shuttering of Boynton-Moton Public School, which educates 97 prekindergarten through 12th grade students.[101] As an illustration of just how strapped for cash the school system has become, Superintendent Dr. Shelbie Williams had been struggling to scrape together just $9,300 to pay the school's gas and electric bills.[102]

In addition to the project itself, some eyebrows have been raised over the contractor selected to do the work, Glover and Associates, a local construction firm. The company is run by Craig Glover, a former vice president for Glover Construction, which was barred from the State of Oklahoma in 2007 after the firm's head, George Glover, Craig Glover's father, pleaded no contest to "conspiring to use prohibited road material and intimidating a state grand jury witness."[103] Craig Glover resigned from his father's company, and upon its debarment, he immediately opened Glover and Associates,[104] which has since gone on to receive more than $4.7 million in contracts from stimulus funds.[105]

Before:

After:

11. Upgraded Office Space and Indoor Parking for Kansas Politicians (Topeka, Kansas) - $39.7 million plus . . .

"The school finance crisis in Kansas continues with no end in sight,"[106] announced the *Lawrence Journal-World*, but that has not stopped Kansas lawmakers from directing federal stimulus funds towards the cost of renovating and upgrading their own offices and the statehouse.

The renovations began more than 12 years ago, before the recession began,[107] but its scope and cost have continued to expand over the years.[108] The original estimate placed the cost somewhere between $90 million and $120 million,[109] but then lawmakers expanded the project to include a $15 million underground parking garage[110] and new office space for themselves along with an $11 million visitor center[111] (lawmakers are "anticipating" the planned visitor center will be privately funded[112]).

Statehouse architect Barry Greis says the price tag now will be "$285 million plus," adding, "I just don't know what the plus is."[113] Democrat state Senator Chris Steineger of Kansas City "said taking advantage of the stimulus program will add to the massive federal budget deficit" and "the underlying problem is that the Capitol renovation project is out of control." Steineger added "this is not creating new jobs."[114]

Photo courtesy of jimmywayne[115]

Scott Rothschild, a reporter for *The Lawrence Journal-World* who works in the statehouse, contrasts the legislature's decision to go ahead with the statehouse renovation and expansion at the same time politicians are cutting Medicaid patient services and doctors' payments. "During these difficult

economic times," Rothschild writes, "it's sometimes hard to reconcile the Legislature writing checks for that project, while using their budget knives on programs that benefit their constituents who are suffering."[116] House Speaker Mike O'Neal concedes, "there was a lot of angst over, 'Why are we doing this when the economy is in the tank?'"[117] But those concerns did not give much pause to the Kansas legislature which authorized $39.7 million of Build America Bonds for the statehouse renovation this summer. "We will be issuing an additional bond issue in the next calendar year to provide $38 million for the statehouse project," added James MacMurray, vice president of finance at the Kansas Development Finance Authority.[118]

12. Agency Under a Cloud Keeps Pool Open for the Summer at No Charge (Youngstown, OH) - $450,950

Kids in Youngstown, Ohio cheered a recent decision to keep the North Side Pool open, but taxpayers may be left feeling like they just took a bath. A $450,950 bath to be specific. The Mahoning-Youngstown Community Action Partnership (MYCAP) received nearly $1.2 million in Community Services Block Grant funding that was intended for "employment-related services and activities that create and sustain economic growth."[119] But after it was discovered that the local government was in danger of closing the pool down for a second year in a row, MYCAP kicked in almost half a million dollars of its own stimulus funding to keep it open for the summer.[120] Interestingly, the decision to use MYCAP stimulus funds for the pool came several weeks after the organization fired its executive director, Richard A. Roller II, for mismanaging funds.[121] Allegations about Mr. Roller surfaced earlier this year surrounding "misuse of funds, nepotism, conflict of interest and a number of other issues, including weatherization work done on the executive director's home."[122] In the fallout from the investigation, conducted by the Ohio Department of Development (ODOD), MYCAP was designated as "high risk," meaning "grant funds given to MYCAP are "vulnerable to fraud, waste and abuse."[123] ODOD ultimately required the entire MYCAP board to undergo ethics and governance training related to federal programs before money could be provided to the pool.[124]

13. Project Costs Jobs, Drastically Reduces Shopping Center Business (Normandy Park, WA) - $3.8 million

Normandy Park Towne Center has struggled to attract and retain businesses,[125] but a recent streetscaping project is making the prospects even worse. The U.S. Department of Transportation provided the city of Normandy Park, Washington with $3.8 million to spruce up eight blocks of 1st Avenue with the addition of "bike lanes, street lights, landscaping and a sidewalk."[126] The impact on local businesses has not been entirely welcome.

Archery Bistro, located in the shopping center and along the road, saw its lunch profits fall from $1,000 a day to $200 a day after construction began, forcing the elimination of two jobs.[127] Restaurant owner, Todd McKittrick, eventually closed the bistro on Sundays and Mondays,[128] and stopped serving lunch, after customers fell from 150 an afternoon to 30.[129] "I thought this was supposed to be federal stimulus, not 'put me out of business,'" noted McKittrick.[130] Since McKittrick had to let go of two employees he has decided to forego his own paycheck, a fact that he blames on the project.[131]

McKittrick noted that much of this fuss was avoidable, in large part because he offered to lay down his own sidewalks when he built the shopping center.[132] The city turned down that offer, saying that if he did so, it would threaten their chances at getting federal funding.[133]

Normandy Park Athletic Club, another business located at the shopping center, has felt the pinch as well, with members either not showing or cancelling memberships altogether.[134]

The project was supposed to be wrapped up in April, but is now projected to end in late August,[135] a delay of four months. In part, the delays grew out of a bitter dispute between the city and the contractor, with both pointing the finger at the other. Pivetta Brothers Construction accused the city of not having a "shovel ready project," while the city manager accused the contractor of not understanding the project plan.[136] But while the dispute lingered, the project was suspended for several weeks, leaving business owners waiting for it to be completed and customers to return.

14. Mohegan Sun Casino Owner Uses Funds for WNBA Practice Facility (Connecticut) - $54 million

The Mohegan Tribe of Indians of Connecticut will be getting $54 million in rural development loans from the United States Department of Agriculture to construct a new four-story tribal government center, which will include a new community center.[137] Unlike most government buildings, however, this one will also contain a practice facility for the Connecticut Sun, the WNBA professional basketball team.[138] The connection between the tribe and team is a close one: the Sun franchise is owned and operated by the Mohegan Sun Casino,[139] which is in turn owned by the Mohegan tribe.[140] All of the team's home games are played in Mohegan Sun Arena,[141] located in the Mohegan Sun Casino. Fittingly, a member of the Mohegan tribal council is a sitting board member on the Connecticut Sun Foundation, a charitable organization affiliated with the team.[142] The tribe originally intended to fund the entire project from casino profits, but was prevented from doing so when revenues declined.[143] Lynn Malerba, tribal council chair, defended the $54 million stimulus loan saying, "The community center is central to who we are as a people."[144]

15. Tree Planting and Urban Forest Creation (NV, SC, PA, GA) – $2.6 million

Four states plan to spend nearly $2.6 million to plant trees in urban areas as part of an effort to help the green economy. In Nevada, the U.S. Forest Service awarded $490,000[145] to the Nevada Division of Forestry to make 2,500 trees[146] available for free to organizations willing to plant them,[147] as well as to provide "landscape management classes for the green industry workforce in the Las Vegas Valley area."[148] Local Las Vegas assemblyman John Hambrick was not impressed with the project saying, "It certainly doesn't sound like it's creating a job, or have a direct benefit to the unemployment rate, or to the needs of the citizens of southern Nevada."[149] South Carolina and Pennsylvania were awarded $897,000[150] and $300,000[151] respectively to plant trees. And, in Georgia, nearly $900,000 was granted to the Georgia Forestry Commission[152] to provide, among other benefits, "more shade."[153]

16. Restoration of One of Nation's Least Visited Parks, Located on Remote Island (Key West, FL) - $13.3 million

Visitors to Key West, Florida with enough time and money can explore one of the National Park Service's (NPS) less convenient destinations—Dry Tortugas National Park. Located 70 miles off shore, the park is almost entirely underwater and accessible only by airplane, private boat or ferry. Despite its remote location, the park will get $13,304,484 in repairs[154] for its main above-water attraction, Fort Jefferson.

Those willing to take the 4 1/2 hour round-trip ferry ride[155] aboard the *Yankee Freedom II* have to pay as much as $165 per person,[156] but will discover that only 40 of the park's 65,000 acres are dry land.[157] Fort Jefferson occupies nearly all of what remains of the island. Built during the mid-nineteenth century to protect the vital shipping lanes in the Gulf of Mexico, Fort Jefferson was never fully completed or armed. Advances in artillery during this time made the Fort obsolete and the Army abandoned it in 1874 before it was even finished. Its use as a military installation was limited to serving as a Confederate prison during the Civil War and as a minor staging area for warships and other craft during various military engagements up to WWII.[158]

Despite its limited use, the fort has been worn down by the tropical climate and weather.[159] Therefore the National Park Service has made it a priority to use almost $7 million of stimulus funds to stabilize the walls of Fort Jefferson.[160] Being closer to Cuba than to the U.S. mainland,[161] construction on Fort Jefferson brings unique logistical challenges. Not only is it expensive to get construction materials to the island, but there is also the hardship of working in a remote marine environment. To accommodate these conditions, two crews of about a dozen New England-based masons are working on two-week rotating shifts.[162] Fortunately, their Florida-based contractor has made life on the island a little more bearable

with meals prepared by a personal chef and time after work available for "snorkeling, fishing, kayaking, reading, or even watching TV."[163]

Considering the park has the third lowest attendance (about 52,000 in 2009) out of any national park in the continental United States run by the NPS,[164] it's safe to say that a majority of taxpayers will never set foot on the island. As heartbreaking as Fort Jefferson's crumbling walls may be, taxpayers might consider crumbling bridges and roads a little closer to home a more significant priority.

17. Firm Gets No-Bid Environmental Cleanup Contract – for a Mess It Helped Make[165] (Simi Valley, CA) - $15.8 million

It's the "Pottery Barn" rule in reverse: you break it, you get paid for it. Aerospace giant Boeing received a no-bid contract worth nearly $16 million[166] in stimulus money to clean up a California site it helped pollute.[167] The facility, the Santa Susana Field Laboratory, was built in the 1940s, and has been used for engine testing and nuclear power work; Boeing has owned it since 1996.[168] In 2007, local authorities fined Boeing $471,000 for dozens of pollution violations at the site, which poisoned wastewater and storm runoff that ended up in the Los Angeles River.[169] The company is currently fighting to overturn a California law that puts strict requirements on cleanup at the site.[170] "It's very upsetting that the government doesn't do more due diligence before it hands money out," said the California Inspector General.[171] Said a local activist to one reporter: "How can one have federal taxpayer money going to a company that is responsible for the contamination and is resisting the cleanup?"[172]

18. Jamming for Dollars (Atlanta, GA) - $762,372

A Georgia Tech assistant professor of music will receive $762,372 to study improvised music.[173] The project will apparently involve the professor jamming with "world-renowned musicians" to "hopefully also create satisfying works of art."[174] The project "seek[s] to understand, model, and support improvisation, or real-time collaborative creativity, in the context of jazz, Indian classical, and avant-garde art music,"[175] according to the project description. "They will also conduct systematic evaluation of formal models in realistic performance contexts, and use brain imaging of improvising musicians to gain insight into highly creative mental activity."[176] How will this help pull the United States out of an historic economic slump? "We are putting money into the local economy that is supporting local jobs," the project's principal, Parag Chordia, an accomplished classical Indian music performer, told a reporter. "We are creating the intellectual capital to support future growth."[177]

19. Nevada Prison's Biomass Plant Too Expensive to Operate (Carson City, NV) - $620,000

An $8 million wood-burning power plant constructed to save energy at the Northern Nevada Correctional Center in Carson City will likely close in the next few months because it is too expensive to operate.[178] The total project cost was $8.8 million, including the state's $6.5 million investment, a $620,000 stimulus award,[179] and money from the U.S. Forest Service.[180] The plant opened in 2007, and officials soon saw trouble: the cost of the plant waste used as fuel was cheap, but getting it to the plant was too costly. Within six months, the plant was operating only sporadically,[181] but despite the problems, the project still received stimulus funding. "It loses money every day," said state corrections director Howard Skolnick in May, when he admitted the plant would likely close.[182] "[The plant]was a good idea, but one that was not well implemented."[183]

20. Monkey and Chimpanzee Responses to Inequity (Atlanta, GA) - $677,462[184]

While much is known about how humans respond to inequity and injustice, researchers at Georgia State University are using almost $700,000 in stimulus funds to study why monkeys respond negatively to inequity and fairness.[185] "Seven species of primates will be asked to make decisions about whether or not to accept rewards in a series of studies in which their outcomes vary relative to their social partners. The influence of social factors like group membership and individual factors like personality will also be investigated. The results of this research will clarify how decision-making is affected by unequal outcomes."[186] Previous research by the investigator on this project had found that "Chimpanzees respond with temper tantrums if they do not get what they desire," and that "Capuchin monkeys and chimpanzees both respond negatively to distributional inequity."[187]

21. Quit Smoking, Get a New Phone (Washington, D.C.) - $497,893

Whether they use the patch, the gum, or go cold turkey, millions of Americans try to quit smoking every year for their own health. Now, Uncle Sam will give them an additional reason to quit: a taxpayer-funded smartphone. The American Legacy Foundation is slated to receive almost half a million dollars to provide quitting smokers with a smartphone so they can contact their quitting support groups by text message or phone call to prevent relapses.[188] The project bills itself as an ideal use of *Recovery Act* funds because "it represents an extraordinary opportunity to jump-start a collaborative effort that spearheads the use of web-enabled mobile devices to enhance the efficiency, fidelity, and impact of an established tobacco quit-line program that benefits underserved communities in Washington, D.C."[189]

22. Streetscaping Project Costs Jobs, Threatens Local Businesses (Twin Lakes, WI) - $899,853

Several local business owners in the Village of Twin Lakes, Wisconsin were surprised to learn that a beautification project on East Main Street in the heart of downtown would begin the week before July 4th weekend. That's because it intersected with the town's annual Libertyfest,[190] whose parade route passes their stores, driving good business their way. Unfortunately, East Main Street has been closed down until the end of October to complete a stimulus project.[191] Adding insult to injury, the parade was rerouted to another part of town.[192]

The idea for a redevelopment of downtown came in 2007, when locals determined that "the area lacks visual cohesion" and "had limited aesthetic appeal, lacked main street features (such as street trees, lighting and well defined sidewalks) or an identity."[193] When $899,853[194] in stimulus money became available, Twin Lakes Village officials decided that this was their chance to finally implement their "streetscaping" project.

In the case of Jane Bodi, owner of Bodi's Bake Shop, her shop on Main Street was dealt a heavy blow when the road in front of her store was closed. "Business was way down the

first week,"[195] she noted with frustration. Since the project began, she has had to reduce employee hours and offer special discounts just to try and account for the lost business.[196]

At a local pub, a single mother of three who waits tables has also felt the impact of the project. Aside from having her hours and pay cut, she says she was forced to list her house for sale and look for a new home 26 miles away, where prices are more affordable.[197] According to this waitress, who wished to remain anonymous, July is the biggest time of year for business in Twin Lakes because it features both Libertyfest and Country Thunder, a local music festival that draws national stars such as Kenny Chesney and Sugarland.[198] July is when local businesses make up for the rest of year, remarked the waitress, "I work all year for this time." Joseph Donile, the owner of another affected business, Croz Pub and Grub, said, "I don't know if I'm going to make it until October and I've been in business for 26 years."[199]

23. Helping Siberians Lobby Russian Policymakers (San Francisco, CA) - $199,862

Pacific Environment, a San-Francisco based non-profit organization that "protects the living environment of the Pacific Rim by promoting grassroots activism, strengthening communities and reforming international policies,"[200] has received a stimulus grant for an experimental applied science project to assist indigenous Siberian communities in engaging Russian policymakers in local civic and environmental issues.[201] Researchers will be helping Siberian locals with "mapping [their] cultural and metaphysical space…[to] facilitate the indigenous voice in policy and management debates "– in other words, becoming grassroots lobbyists. Pacific Environment itself calls the project "high-risk, high return."[202]

24. Ship Museum Averaging 30 Visitors A Day (Toledo, OH) - $200,000

The *S.S. Willis B. Boyer*, formerly the *Col. James M. Schoonmaker*, was proclaimed to be "The World's Largest Bulk Freighter" and "Queen of the Lakes" – from 1911 to 1914, that is.[203] These days, it is more of a king of the stimulus, having just received $200,000 as part of the *Recovery Act* funding the state of Ohio received from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.[204] Now a museum, this large boat sits docked in International Park. The museum is only open from April through October,[205] and hosts 6,000 visitors a year, or an average of only 30 visitors a day.[206] It lost its funding from the City of Toledo in 2007.[207] Now the American taxpayer is funding what the boat's own city will not, and what one visitor described as "ready for the scrapyard."[208] The museum has survived because of partnerships with the Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority, the *Toledo Blade*, Boyer/Riverfront, Inc., many volunteers,[209] and renting out the space for private events.[210] Now supporters hope that this stimulus money will help with sprucing up the boat, once host to "legendary guests such as Andrew Carnegie and others,"[211] and possibly moving it elsewhere in Toledo to attract more visitors.

25. Weather Predictions for Other Planets (San Antonio, TX) - $298,543

Want to know if it's going to rain this week . . . on Venus? According to scientists at the Southwest Research Institute (SWRI) in Texas, you absolutely do. So the government has given them nearly $300,000 in stimulus funds to satisfy the American taxpayer's profound need for interplanetary weather info.[212] "The atmospheric forecasting of weather and climate on other planets has great public appeal," insist the SWRI researchers in their grant summary. Therefore, they will boldly go where few meteorologists have gone before: the lower atmosphere of Venus. (They're just the folks to do it, too: they boast of their expertise in "the atmospheres and exospheres of Mercury, Venus, the Moon, Io, Titan, comets, Chiron, Triton, Pluto, and the Jovian planets."[213]) How will you, the U.S. taxpayer, learn of the results? SWRI's findings will find a home in "popular publications, museum presentations, and radio shows," the researchers wrote.[214]

26. Shoddy Weatherization Contractor Promises Changes (Houston, TX) - $11.2 million

If 60 percent of the work you did had to be redone by someone else, you wouldn't hold onto your job for long, or expect to be paid for the work. However, that seems to be what happened with home weatherization efforts by Sheltering Arms Senior Services of Houston, according to a May report from the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs.[215] The report described problems of overspending on administrative costs, a systemic lack of documentation, and simply substandard work, with 33 of 53 homes sampled requiring workmanship corrections.[216] The non-profit company, which received more than $11 million[217] in stimulus funding for work in the Houston area, was the second largest recipient of stimulus funds for weatherization projects in the state of Texas.[218] Since Texas Watchdog first reported on this in May,[219] the director of the weatherization program at Sheltering Arms has been removed and the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs weatherization director is on record saying that Sheltering Arms "have fixed or are trying to fix the problems we identified."[220] One has to wonder how much stimulus money they will have to misuse before drastic steps are taken.

27. Army Corps of Engineers Gets Its Due With Museum Exhibits (St. Louis, MO) - $430,695[221]

The Army Corp of Engineers has hired an Oregon-based graphics design firm to design and build interpretive exhibits at the National Great Rivers Museum and other sites outside of St. Louis, Missouri. In addition to providing educational displays of the natural and cultural history of the Mississippi River, the exhibits will also be used to "[e]nhance the public's understanding of the Corps' mission for water resource development."[222] The graphics design firm has received stimulus contracts from the Corps of Engineers and the Department of Interior worth well over a million dollars for similar work.[223]

28. Monkeys Get High for Science (Winston-Salem, NC) - $144,541

Researchers at Wake Forest University think that, in at least one case, it is *good* to monkey around with stimulus dollars. The Department of Health and Human Services has sent $71,623 to the Winston-Salem college to see how monkeys react under the influence of cocaine. The project, titled "Effect of Cocaine Self-Administration on Metabotropic Glutamate Systems," would have the monkeys self-administer the drugs while researchers monitor and study their glutamate levels.[224] When asked how studying drug-crazed primates would improve the national economy, a Wake Forest University Medical School Spokesman said, "It's actually the continuation of a job that might not still be there if it hadn't been for the stimulus funding. And it's a good job." He added, "It's also very worthwhile research."[225]

29. Field Trip Reimbursements and Inflated Job Numbers (Oakland, CA) - $3.1 million

What if the government paid you to take field trips? The California State Inspector General's office reviewed the expenses of the City of Oakland's Workforce Investment Board (WIB), which was hired to administer job-training projects. An astonishing 15 percent of all reviewed contractor expenditures were found to be ineligible for reimbursement or lacked sufficient documentation.[226] WIB commissioned the Oakland Private Industry Council (OPIC) to administer *Recovery Act* funds under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) program, but the program has suffered from a series of missteps that began when the City of Oakland spent recovery dollars on non-recovery activities.[227] Of particular note, one organization received reimbursements for field trips to the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk and the Waterworld, USA theme park.[228] In addition to reimbursing ineligible expenditures, the Inspector General found that the WIB overstated the number of jobs created by nearly 500 percent, reporting 35 jobs created instead of the accurate total of six.[229]

30. Two Riders an Hour Get Brand New Buses (Winter Haven, FL) - $2.4 million[230]

Winter Haven Area Transit (WHAT) buses carry two to three riders per hour, according to the City Commission's liaison to the Transit authority.[231] While that may be a bit of an undercount according to the Transit Authority,[232] City Commissioner Jamie Beckett is "not convinced we need 40-foot buses for two or three riders an hour."[233] All the same, the town is getting five new buses for its fleet,[234] thanks to more than $2.38 million stimulus dollars.[235] The entire WHAT budget for FY 2009 was only $60,000, and for FY 2010 it was only $110,000,[236] yet the average cost of the new buses will be $380,000.[237] At least there will be plenty of leg room, if the buses are as empty as they seem.

31. Studying the Effect of Local Populations on the Environment...in the Himalayas (Ann Arbor, MI) - $529,648

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has awarded researchers at the University of Michigan a grant to study the "reciprocal relationship between population processes (marriage, fertility, and migration) and the environment (landusefcover [sic], vegetation abundance, species diversity, and consumption of natural resources) *in the foothills of the Nepalese Himalayas*."[238] What this relationship means to the population of American taxpayers halfway around

the world is less clear. In 2007, researchers received a five-year grant for essentially the same project from the National Science Foundation worth almost $2.5 million.[239]

32. Public Relations Firm Wins Big Stimulus Bucks (New York, NY) - $25.8 million

What do you do when a key government program is unpopular with the general public? In the case of the stimulus, you sign a multi-million dollar contract with a public relations firm previously embroiled in controversy. For some time, the Administration's push for health information technology systems has been facing significant public resistance because of privacy concerns.[240] In response, the Department of Health and Human Services spent $25.8 million on a contract with Ketchum Inc. to help win over public opinion.[241] Ketchum was criticized before, however, on other governmental work. The reason? Producing fake TV news stories for government agencies.[242]

33. Contractor Convicted of Public Corruption Gets Public Money for Sidewalk Contract (Monroe, LA) - $211,468

A former director of community affairs for the City of Monroe, Louisiana, who was convicted twice for taking financial kickbacks from contractors, has received $211,468[243] in stimulus funds to build a sidewalk.[244] Interestingly, Andy Jackson, owner of Jackson-Fontenot Construction, obtained the contract to build the South Third Street sidewalk project despite not being the lowest bidder.[245] As a public official, Jackson was previously accused of taking kickbacks in exchange for favors and big contracts. In 2001, he was convicted of fraud and bribery and one count of conspiracy to commit fraud and bribery.[246] Jackson was sentenced to six and half years in federal prison and served 15 months.[247] Carnell Person, who is currently a vice president at Jackson-Fontenot, also happens to be the city superintendant of streets. The city ethics attorney told the local newspapers that Mr. Person is not necessarily in violation of ethics rules because he might be in a different 'agency' than the one advertising the bids.[248] Some local residents have raised other concerns about the project. One neighbor was concerned that the sidewalk would give drug dealers, "more property closer to my house. I don't feel safe now, and I would feel less safe"[249]

34. Youth Center Awarded Grant May Not Get Built (Glendale, CA) - $131,000

"You're all going to be wearing hard hats in April," Maria Rochart, executive director of New Horizons Family Center, declared in March about the impending construction on New Horizons Family Center's child-care facilities.[250] Today, the project does not appear any closer to starting.[251] Nearly a year ago, New Horizons was awarded $131,000 in grant funding for the construction of a new facility to care for low-income kids after school.[252] According to the *Glendale News-Press*, "Construction on New Horizons Family Center's long-awaited 'Children's Village Nuestra Casa' was to begin last spring after years of delays and hundreds of thousands in government funding. But months after the nonprofit's founder told city commissioners the project was about to break ground, the lot on the 1200 block of South Maryland Avenue sits unchanged."[253] This is not the first problem that the project has experienced. In mid-2009, the city of Glendale noted that the New Horizons project was considered "in the plan correction stage for approximately one-year," and therefore needed "confirmation that the project is shovel ready."[254] It appears it was not. The Glendale, California city council opted to

move forward with the child care facility instead of using the funds to upgrade South Glendale Avenue "which has not undergone major improvement since 1992."[255] Those same officials may now be regretting that decision as the corner lot where Children's Village is supposed to be built remains empty. Local officials said that the organization may be having difficulty arranging for financing, but New Horizons received a 2009 earmark through the Department of Justice for $60,000.[256]

35. "Aqua City" Water Park Makes a Splash (Dunkirk, NY) - $153,520

Just because the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* explicitly prohibited stimulus funding from being used on swimming pools,[257] it did not stop the city of Dunkirk, New York from awarding $153,520 for the construction of a new pool-based theme park.[258] The funds will be used to develop a new indoor water park for kids called "Aqua City" that "will be equipped with an indoor-outdoor water slide, splash- pool, life-size submarine, and underwater murals."[259] It will be attached to the Clarion Hotel near the city's waterfront to boost tourism, and "the central feature to the water park is the submarine, themed as U-97, the German U-Boat that sunk in Lake Erie not far from Dunkirk."[260] Mayor Richard Frey glowed, "The water slide is going to go outside the building and come back in. It's quite unique, the whole thing."[261] Funding will come from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which the city's development director, Kory Ahlstrom, noted was met with approval by agency officials as "the perfect project."[262] Continued Mayor Frey, "There's a periscope, . . . there's big murals of sunken ships, . . . it's kind of like pirate land or something."[263]

36. Scientist Attempts to Create Joke Machine (Evanston, IL) - $712,883[264]

Conan O'Brien vs. Jay Leno was nothing. Competition among late night television hosts is about to get very interesting. That's because researchers at Northwestern University are using stimulus money to develop "machine-generated humor."[265] And nothing is funnier than a robot repeating someone else's jokes. The lead designer plans to use artificial intelligence to create a "comedic performance agent" that "will be funny no matter what it is talking about."[266] Computer systems will mine jokes from the Internet and then use them to create hilarious presentations that mimic real-life comedians.[267] The lead designer hopes to model his new creation off of *News at Seven*,[268] a web-based "entertainment oriented system that combines clips from CSPAN with topics [sic] humor and comments pulled from Twitter to create a *Daily Show*-like experience."[269]

37. Eighth Rock From the Sun (Berkeley, CA) - $456,663

Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley are putting nearly a half million dollars of stimulus funds towards getting a better understanding of the global circulation in the atmosphere of Neptune.[270] One area in particular that will be examined is the altitude of clouds on the planet. Results will be compared with previous analysis from the Voyager era,[271] when coincidentally, the unemployment rate was lower.

38. Reducing Menopausal Hot Flashes Through Yoga (Winston-Salem, NC) - $294,958

In 1966, His Holiness Sri Swami Satchidanandaji Maharaj created the practice of Integral Yoga,[272] a branch of yoga with a significant spiritual emphasis. Now, researchers at Wake Forest University have received nearly $300,000 to study whether Integral Yoga "can be an effective method to reduce the frequency and/or severity of hot flashes" in menopausal women.[273] "The goal of Integral Yoga, and the birthright of every individual, is to realize the spiritual unity behind all the diversities in the entire creation and to live harmoniously as members of one universal family."[274] A total of 60 post-menopausal women who experience more than seven hot flashes a day are being recruited to participate.[275]

39. Research: Marketing Video Games to the Elderly (Raleigh, NC and Atlanta, GA) - $1.2 million

North Carolina State University and Georgia Institute of Technology research scientists received $770,856 and $427,824, respectively, in stimulus grants from the National Science Foundation for collaborative research into how video games, such as Nintendo Wii's Boom Blox,[276] can help improve mental health for the elderly.[277] "Results will aid designers who currently have little knowledge of the interface and game-play needs of older players."[278] According to the overseers of the study, "One of our main goals is to produce guidelines for producing games for older adults."[279]

40. Contractor Gets Millions In Stimulus Funds Despite Lawsuits and Numerous Federal Probes ($6.5 million)

On October 25, 2009, the *San Diego Union-Tribune* reported that the Department of Homeland Security was conducting a criminal investigation into two companies that were involved in debris removal following the 2007 California wildfires, one of them being Granite Construction Company.[280] Yet, on February 3, 2010, Granite Construction Company reportedly received a stimulus contract worth more than $6.5 million to do work on "24.4 miles of Wawona Road (Highway 41) through Yosemite National Park."[281] Granite Construction Company boasts on its website that it is "equally effective at building both large and small jobs from small site developments to massive billion-dollar federal projects."[282] What is missing from the "About Us" section on its website is that "the company faces three federal probes after *The San Diego Union-Tribune* exposed questionable billing of [San Diego] for wildfire cleanup."[283] Following the 2007 California wildfires, the city of San Diego hired Granite Construction and another contractor to remove the rubble and debris left behind by homes victimized by the disaster.[284] *The San Diego Union-Tribune* conducted a private investigation of the removal process in mid-2008, where they alleged that Granite Construction "removed questionable quantities of debris, overcharged for materials, billed for work they didn't perform, provided receipts that didn't back up their charges and cost [San Diego] millions more than stated in their contracts."[285] "Possible criminal fraud and misuse of taxpayer money prompted FEMA to ask the Inspector General for an investigation, sources told the *Union-Tribune* in May 2009. In October 2008, the city [San Diego] sued…Granite, alleging they knowingly overcharged for services and falsified records, and, as a result, owe more than $2 million."[286] That case is now on hold until the criminal investigation is completed.[287]

41. Improving Privacy on Social Networking Websites (Durham, NC) - $498,176[288]

Researchers at Duke University in North Carolina have received a grant from the National Science Foundation worth almost a half million dollars for investigating new networking approaches for improved privacy and functionality for social networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace.[289] A local reporter interviewed the NSF program manager overseeing the project and asked about the seemingly large award. He replied that the NSF considered reducing the amount of the award, but choose not to in consideration of engineering challenges of the project which "merited the significant sum."[290] Taxpayers might share the view of a student, who was also interviewed, who asked, "…you kind of choose to make a Facebook, so why should [NSF] be investing all this money?"[291]

42. Band Shell Mural Gets Fresh Paint Job (Helena, MT) - $18,500

The Capital City Band enjoys playing its Thursday night concerts at Veteran's Memorial Park in Helena, Montana, but of late, it has found itself frustrated by subpar acoustics in the band shell.[292] Unfortunately, the park's budget would not cover the costs of a structural engineer and installation of the tiles.[293] Nevertheless, the Helena Parks and Recreation Department decided to use $18,500 in stimulus funding to commission a new mural for the band shell interior, for which only "exterior paint" may be used "to minimize affecting the structural and historical integrity of the bandshell."[294] The current mural, which depicts trees with leaves made by many local children's painted hand prints, was painted ten years ago.[295] The local Parks & Recreation director said, "we want it to be a design that reflects some of Helena's icons and Helena's personality as a community — its history and environment. We want it to be visually seen … from a distance."[296]

43. Microchips Track Citizen Use of Recycling Bins (Dayton, OH) - $500,000

Residents of Dayton, Ohio, are being encouraged to recycle more, using their new blue, 96-gallon, microchip-embedded bins that will be paid for with stimulus dollars.[297] The microchips, which use radio frequency identification technology, are installed in the bin handles, and will be used by the city to track citizen participation in the recycling program.[298] In addition to paying for at least 8,000 bins and equipping collection trucks to read the microchips, $500,000 will pay for a consultant to design a campaign promoting recycling for Dayton.[299] The half-million dollars is part of a $1.6 million Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant received by the City.[300] Dayton is also buying an additional 1,300 recycling bins with a $42,000 grant from Montgomery County and $18,000 of its own funds.[301]

44. Ferry Boat Company Serving Island of 600 Gets Terrorism Prevention Grant (Beaver Island, MI) - $30,000

Known to its 600 inhabitants as "America's Emerald Isle," Beaver Island, Michigan is most people's idea of a remote vacation destination.[302] The island will also benefit from a $30,000 terrorism prevention grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.[303] Funding will flow to the Beaver Island Boat Company, which makes 375 round trips per year to and from the island,[304] and operates from April until Christmas, serving 40,000 passengers a year, or just over 100 passengers a day.[305] It is not clear how the money will help protect against terrorism, however, given that it will be spent to upgrade navigational

equipment; the grant does not identify what security devices it will buy.[306] Funding will also be used to keep unauthorized people away from restricted areas; but, added general manager Margo Marks, "There are already background checks on all existing mariners and anyone new to the industry to verify who they say they are."[307]

45. Understanding Perceptions of the Economic Stimulus (Dallas, TX & Houston, TX) - $193,956

If stimulus advocates aim to please the American voter, they should probably talk to the researchers at Rice University, Houston[308] and the University of Texas, Dallas, where the National Science Foundation shelled out stimulus dollars to study people's perceptions of the stimulus.[309] Specifically, the study's results are to be used to "estimate the impact of stimulus funds on the perceptions of citizens and the choices of local community decision makers."[310] It would probably be a safe bet that if citizens knew that stimulus funds were being used to fund research on their perception on the stimulus, it would sway them in a negative direction.

46. Agency Spends Nearly $1 Million on Overhead Instead of Jobs Programs (California) - $940,000

California Inspector General Laura Chick found that the Tulare County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) spent nearly $1 million on overhead costs like "rent, equipment and utility bills" instead of helping kids and adults find jobs.[311] According to the report, the proper amount of overhead should have only been $60,000, since the WIB is just a pass through to the subcontractors actually providing the services.[312] The Tulare County WIB received a total of $6.8 million in stimulus dollars and of the amount spent, more than 20 percent went to overhead,[313] leaving Ms. Chick to comment, "if you look at that as a percentage [of the total funds], that's a huge chunk." [314] Of the WIB's accounting practices, the Inspector General commented, "In my mind, they have failed Basic Accounting 101."[315]

47. Snowmaking and Chairlifts at Mt. Snow (West Dover, VT) - $25 million

Mount Snow may have opened 56 years ago[316] with just two chairlifts, two rope tows, and seven trails, but these days it has blossomed into one of New England's premier outdoor park destinations that hosts festivals, conferences, weddings, and of course vacationers looking to bike in the summer or ski in the winter.[317] Having received a $25 million[318] zero-bond loan from the Vermont Economic Development Agency, which itself received $135 million in bond authority under the *Recovery Act*,[319] "Mt. Snow will use the stimulus dollars to replace the Summit Local and Sunbrook chairlifts, construct a 120-million-gallon storage pond for snowmaking, and install additional snowmaking fan guns."[320] "Mount Snow was pursuing the chairlift renovations when they learned that government stimulus funds were available for ski area capital improvements."[321] Mount Snow's Director of Planning hopes the new lifts solve at least one important problem, "The Sunbrook area is underutilized and there's great terrain back there. This new lift will encourage people to ski or ride more at Sunbrook."[322]

48. SBA Contracts Evade Competition Rules - $4.3 million

Rules were made to be broken, especially if you are in a hurry and can't be bothered. At least that seemed to be the case at the Small Business Administration (SBA) when it spent more than $4 million on contracts to improve its computer systems, of which $4.3 million was stimulus funds.[323] The *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* provided the agency with $20 million to improve information technology systems, but $4.3 million awarded to Copper River Information Technology and DRT Strategies has come under heavy fire from the SBA Inspector General. The SBA Inspector General report stated, "In our opinion, the contract awards appeared to be pushed through the Agency, without obtaining the proper

signatures and clearance for the acquisition plan."[324] For the contracts with both firms, they were awarded without competition and designated as small business set-asides under the 8(a) program.[325] Because proper procedures had not been followed, the SBA Inspector General concluded, "the contracting officer should not have awarded the contracts to Copper River and DRT."[326] Among the problems cited in the report, SBA "awarded the contract without legal clearance," "did not establish measurable outcomes for the project," and "because the procurement . . . was awarded non-competitively, the contracting officer did not publicize the procurement."[327]

49. Stimulus Turns Local Business's Waterfront into Sandbox (Lancaster, VA) – $450,000

Restaurant Owner Ron Edwards relies heavily on his waterfront dock for business. Located at the confluence of Greenvale Creek and the Rappahannock River in Virginia, his restaurant, the Upper Deck, was a common stop for boaters looking to get a bite to eat.[328] As a seasonal restaurant, more than 60 percent of his customers are boaters,[329] making any impediment to his docks a serious problem. Unfortunately, after a stimulus project got underway to help boaters, Mr. Edwards was left wondering if his business would survive.

The Upper Deck has become a popular destination, hosting events for some notable officials over the years, such as the retirement party of Jack Douglas, the noted FBI profiler.[330] Jack Crawford, the FBI character featured in the movie *Silence of the Lambs*, was based on Douglas.[331]

For years, sediment buildup was making the local marina, down river from the Upper Deck, virtually impassable.[332] As a result, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers allocated $450,000[333] in stimulus money to dredge the marina to a depth of seven feet.[334] Along the way, the Corps moved 17,000 cubic yards of dredged material and placed it on a beach upstream.[335] While they believed that would solve the problem, it only made things worse for Edwards' boating customers. The water currents pushed the dredged materials back down river, creating a sandbar around his dock.[336] With his dock rendered useless, Mr. Edwards explains, "last year, a 34-foot sailboat could park at the dock. Now you could only tie a pony to it."[337]

50. Tour Boat Showcases High Life In Hyannis (Cape Cod, MA) - $43,214

Kids ride free on Hyannis Harbor Tours in Cape Cod, Massachusetts,[338] and with the help of the Homeland Security Department, are also a little more secure. The Federal Emergency Management Agency provided the tour boat company with a $43,214[339] terrorism prevention grant.[340] Hyannis Harbor Tours specializes in one-hour cruises around the harbor that give riders a chance to cruise "past the historic Kennedy compound" aboard the 99 year old Maine Coastal Steamer *Prudence*.[341] Aboard the sleepy tour boat, one guide noted that few people paid attention to his commentary until he mentions Cape Cod's most famous family: "No one listens until you say 'Kennedy.'"[342]

51. Program Gets Money It Doesn't Need - $362 million

When a federal agency says that one of its programs has too much money, it is the surest sign that the program has too much money. The *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* allocated $400 million for Women Infant and Children (WIC) program, on top of the program's regular allotment, to ensure the payments during the economic downturn.[343] What made it unusual, however, was that WIC already has a $125 million "contingency reserve fund" that Congress replenishes each year.[344] According to an April 2010 report of the United States Department of Agriculture Inspector General, only $38 million out of the $400 million was spent in 2009, and WIC administrators do not expect to need any of the remaining funds in 2010.[345] Program officials told the IG's investigators that they didn't expect to get that much money in the first place.[346]

52. Over Budget Perry Hill School Renovation Gets Stimulus Grant While Teachers Get Pink Slips (Shelton, CT) - $175,800

At least a few teachers in Shelton, Connecticut may wonder if they might still have a job if not for cost overruns on a local school renovation—or why stimulus money is being used to bail out the project, not save their jobs. Renovations of Perry Hill School in Shelton are $1.5 million over budget[347] at the same time the school district is laying off dozens of employees,[348] including 27 teachers, because of ongoing budget woes.[349] To help make up for the overruns, the town was forced to transfer $750,000 from its general fund,[350] including approximately $176,000 in stimulus funds from the Department of Energy, which will be used for a cooling system.[351]

53. School In Need of New Roof And HVAC Instead Gets Concession Stand (Montross, VA) - $22,000

Washington and Lee High School in Montross, Virginia has a leaky roof and poorly functioning HVAC system,[352] which is why the school was provided resources for . . . a new concession stand? That was the reaction of at least one local member of the Westmoreland County Board of Supervisors, Russ Culver, who noted that, "the concession stand is not a necessity as far as educating the county's children."[353] County officials received a $22,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for the concession stand.[354] Culver noted that the same county funds used to supplement the construction of a concession stand were needed to fix the high school's roof and HVAC system.[355] School board member, Rosemary Mahan, disputed this point and noted that, in addition to other problems, the concession stand is "an eyesore" and "the first thing that visitors see when they come to athletic events at the high school."[356] Board of Supervisors Chairman Woody Hynson ultimately prevailed in approving the measure, however, offering his own rationale: "I think we all know that a new concession stand is necessary and that we need to find a way to get the price down. People like those french fries that we're told are so bad for us, and nobody buys more hot dogs than I do at one time."[357]

54. Law and Order: Spanish Empire (Miami, FL) - $59,845

Apparently, modern America is not the only litigious society. Researchers at Florida International University received nearly $60,000 to document and provide statistical analysis regarding the rise of colonial lawsuits in the Spanish Empire.[358] The study will "compares five regions - Mexico City and Oaxaca, Mexico; Lima and Trujillo, Peru; and Castile, Spain - to reveal that colonial women, slaves, and Indians entered the courts at a pace that outstripped even the overall rise in civil suits, using new legal concepts to sue husbands, masters, and native leaders."[359] The project "systematically explores the options litigants faced in the larger field of the court system: who could sue whom, where, when, and over what?"[360] The grant recipient has already delivered one paper based on the taxpayer-funded

research to the American Historical Association annual meeting in San Diego and paid for participation in a conference last month in Mexico.[361]

55. Airport Receives $800,000 To Improve Wildlife Fence (West Lafayette, IN) - $665,880[362]

Incidents of wildlife strikes at the Purdue University Airport in West Lafayette, Indiana are extremely rare, but that didn't stop stimulus money from being used to fix the problem. Without a commercial carrier for more than six years, the airport has only had 14 reported incidents of an aircraft striking wildlife since 1990, of which thirteen were birds.[363] Officials also suspect that an airplane may have struck a skunk in 2006.[364] Yet, the airport will be replacing its entire current eight-foot perimeter fence with an eleven-foot fence using a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) grant worth over $665,000.[365] In 2004, the FAA issued guidance recommending airports have 10-12 foot fence to keep deer off aircraft movement areas, with the exception that "in some cases an airport may be able to use an 8-foot chain link fence with 3 strand barbed outriggers depending upon the amount of deer activity."[366] There are no reported deer incidents at Purdue Airport.[367]

56. State-of-the-Art Animal Shelter Given Energy Upgrade (Roswell, NM) - $195,500

Roswell, New Mexico may be known as the site of the most famous alleged alien landing in American history, but now it will also be home to an energy-efficient animal control shelter. The Department of Energy provided the City of Roswell with nearly $200,000 to make "energy upgrades" to the new shelter.[368] This comes at the same time that the city council plans to write off more than $2.2 million in uncollected debts owed to the city from unpaid utility bills, loans and library fines.[369] In 2008, however, an effort was made to provide some funding for the new shelter when the city council asked permission from the State of New Mexico to transfer $100,000 away from the International UFO Museum project.[370] The new facility will feature "[a] specially-designed, energy-efficient HVAC system for animal shelters," noted Roswell animal control official, Mike Matthews, "and we use low-flow toilets to save water usage."[371] Electric bills were averaging $385 a month to cool the shelter; the new facility is larger than the old one, and electric bills are not expected to go down.[372]

57. High School Baseball Field Canopy, Concession Stand Repaired (Choctaw, MS) - $189,000

Fans of the Choctaw Central High School Mighty Warriors may enjoy a baseball game a little more next season, after stimulus funds help spruce up their team's field. Nearly $190,000 will be spent to paint a metal canopy in use at the baseball field,[373] along with repairing and replacing a retaining wall behind the concession stand to protect the field.[374] The school is run by the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, using revenue from the Pearl River Resort-home to Silver Star and Golden Moon casinos which the tribe owns.[375] The Choctaws have been embroiled in a controversy over the proposed construction of a new $17 million casino,[376] which has some Mississippi officials questioning whether it is a good idea.[377]

58. 14 Flat Screen Televisions for the State Department (NY, VT, GA, TX, CA) - $36,924

State Department officials took full advantage of their stimulus dollars and stocked up on 14 flat screen televisions. Ranging in size from 42 inches to 55 inches, the department paid Allied Contract nearly $37,000 for the Toshiba sets, along with wall mounts to hang them neatly in the office.[378] A quick price check, however, raises serious questions about whether they got such a good deal. The award was made on July 9, 2010, but the same new equipment on RitzCamera.com would cost much less. Ten 42-inch Toshiba flat screen models cost $1,084.94 apiece, with shipping, for a total of $10,849.40. Four 55-inch screens were available for $1,522.94 apiece, with shipping, for a total of $6,091.76.[379] All remaining purchases were mounts to hang the televisions on the wall, with the grand total of all equipment coming to less than $18,000. That would leave nearly $18,000 left over and a lot of questions about whether or not the State Department is a good shopper.

59. Commerce Department Gets Makeover, Moves Aquarium Door (Washington, DC) - $185 million

When it was built in 1931, the Herbert C. Hoover Building (HCHB) was the largest building in the world. Now it is one of the largest stimulus recipients in the United States. Housing approximately 3,500 federal employees at the Department of Commerce, the White House Visitor Center, and the National Aquarium, the HCHB has received over $185 million in federal stimulus dollars[380] as part of a decade-long,[381] $893 million, 8-phase project to renovate and "green" the building.[382] Elements of this massive effort include renovating unused office space for temporarily rotating groups of up to 400 Commerce employees at a time and ripping out walls to install 16 miles of insulation.[383] Notably, the project also moves the National Aquarium from the northeast side of the building to the south side, allowing "for a dedicated entrance and more room for additional displays."[384]

Photo courtesy of Mr. T in D.C.

60. Planting Palm Trees (Fresno, CA) - $341,000

Traveling on the west side of Fresno, California, you may find your way onto Kearney Boulevard, named after the early 20th century entrepreneur and millionaire Theo Kearney.[385] The boulevard extends 11 miles from the west side of downtown Fresno towards Kerman, California.[386] The County of Fresno recently awarded a landscaping firm a $341,000 contract, funded by stimulus dollars, to plant 54 Washingtonia Robusta palm trees along six miles of the road between Marks and Westlawn Avenues.[387] Taxpayers outside of Fresno may wonder why this road is in need of beautification. Although it is an historic boulevard leading to the historic Kearny Mansion and surrounding park, it is a two-lane rural road for most of its length and is already known for being lined with palm trees.[388] The winning bid for the contract came in lower than

the county engineer's original estimate as a result of lower than anticipated cost for the palm trees.[389] Taxpayers may rest easier knowing that the palm trees came in at just $4,000 a piece.[390]

61. Booze Business in Colorado Gets Stimulus Loans (Colorado) - $5 million

Colorado liquor distilleries, breweries and wineries are getting $5 million in stimulus-backed business loans.[391] According to the Colorado *Recovery Act* website, some of the alcohol-related recipients include $1.1 million for Stranahan's Colorado Whiskey.[392] The store, which claims to be the first whiskey distiller in the state, describes its whiskey this way: "It's not often you can bottle up the Rockies, or cup your hands in a mountain stream."[393] Another recipient was the Fort Collins Brewery, which received $1.4 million.[394] In contrast other Colorado agencies will not lease property to alcohol related businesses.[395]

62. Second Least Busy Train Stop in New York Given Twice What it Needs to Renovate Station (Rouses Point, NY) - $833,000[396]

The train station at Rouses Point (pop. 2,277)[397] in New York is undergoing a $670,000 renovation, leaving some taxpayers wondering why more than twice that amount was awarded to the project.[398] While the train station is a registered historic landmark, it is making new history with this renovation.[399] Plans to turn the station into a museum and waiting area to accompany the Amtrak stop were moved forward by an $833,000 transportation stimulus grant.[400] In the past, the station also received a $95,000 earmark,[401] providing a total of $926,500 now available to restore the old building. In addition to all of that, a $600,000 award from Amtrak was used to make the station's platform compliant with the Americans with Disability Act,[402] all amounting to around $1.5 million to renovate the train station. However, during 2009, Amtrak only made two stops a day here and only 1,046 people got off or on a train at this stop during the entire year, making it the second least busy station in New York.[403]

63. Residents Dismissed as Tilting at Windmill (Union Beach, NJ) - $5.8 million

Obnoxious and scary[404] are just a few of the ways local residents of Union Beach have described a proposed 380-foot tall, stimulus-funded,[405] industrial wind turbine just 1,080 feet away from their homes.[406] The 1.5 megawatt turbine is to go up by January 2011, pending impact studies on various species of local birds and bats.[407] Residents raised numerous concerns at the June 21, 2010 Bayshore Regional Sewage Authority (BSRA) meeting including: environmental impact, lower property values, noise effects, flickering shadows, and other public health risks such as the 100 decibel low frequency sounds the wind turbine will emit.[408] Wind Turbine Syndrome seems to have particularly strong effects on those with pre-existing migraine disorders, motion sensitivity, or inner ear damage. [409] Residents have also started a website at *www.noturbine.com* to document their objections, which include that upon completion, the turbine blades will each be 75 feet taller than the Statue of Liberty.[410] At a July 8, 2010 meeting, the Monmouth County Board of Freeholders passed a resolution opposing the construction of the turbine and asking the BRSA to cease all activity on the project until residents' concerns have been adequately addressed.[411] While BRSA executives insist that the mill will allow them to bring down the cost of power in the region, residents continue to oppose the project. Bill Shewan, of neighboring Hazlet, put it thus: "Sometimes governments are wrong, and the people have to rise up." [412]

64. Are Viewers Primed by Prime-Time Politics? (Princeton, NJ & Ann Arbor, MI) -$317,216

By changing the criteria voters use to evaluate their political candidates and politics, the media undoubtedly affect mass preferences. Now scholars at the University of Michigan[413] and Princeton University[414] will use stimulus funds to study the ways that the "media priming effect" can be measured. "In particular, results will bear on how, when, and why campaigns affect candidate evaluations and policy opinion."[415] While quantifying the effects of media priming might be valuable to politicians trying to get elected or those trying to manipulate media consumers, most Americans would probably just rather change the channel.

65. DTV "Experts" Plug Boxes Into a Wall (Buffalo, NY) - $350,000

The Federal Communication Commission (FCC) spent $350,000 to hire "experts" to help people hook up digital converter boxes made necessary by the federal government's recent digital switch.[416] Most of those jobs were short-term jobs, lasting only during the DTV transition.[417] Most DTV converter boxes are no more difficult to hook up than connecting the "antenna-in" cable, the "TV-out" cable, and the power cord into an outlet,[418] raising questions about the need for "experts." The installation guide provided by the FCC is only four easy steps, including instructions to plug the power cords "into a power outlet."[419]

66. Learn How Life Works on a Smartphone (Cambridge, MA) - $435,271

Does your 14-year-old need to learn biology on the go? There's an app for that . . . or will be, thanks to the U.S. taxpayer. Scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) have been awarded $435,271 to develop iPod Touch or smartphone apps to teach introductory biology to high school students, and to study the games' utility.[420] The project, which has created two jobs,[421] will develop a series of simulation games to help 9th and 10th graders "understand important biology concepts with which they often struggle."[422] Each game takes one to two weeks to play.[423] According to the MIT researchers, the games "will both help prepare future scientists in this area as well as inform the general public about the science behind advances of interest."[424]

67. If Government Builds it, They Will Come . . . We Hope (Lakewood, IL) - $18 million

Local officials in Lakewood Village (pop. 3,050) recently approved plans for a $40 million sports complex by a unanimous vote in the hopes of bringing in up to $500,000 in annual tax revenue from hosting local, national, and even international sports events.[425] The complex, spanning over 165 acres will feature 17 lighted baseball fields, seven soccer fields, an indoor soccer dome, an arena for basketball, an extreme sports park for skating and BMX competitions, a gas station, and a 125,000 square foot building for a restaurant and retail facilities – all of this using $18 million of bonding authority granted to McHenry County from the stimulus bill.[426] That portion of the money has been described as both "only a start-up mechanism" and a "bridge loan."[427]

Not so fast, say the neighboring residents whose lives will be affected by the proposed facility. The most recent public meeting of the Lakewood Village trustees drew enough attendees to fill the room, the standing-room behind the chairs, and standing room into the hallway.[428] A local blogger who attended observed that "besides the consultants, village officials and staff, most in attendance were people objecting from the neighborhood."[429]

Concerns raised included traffic, light pollution, noise, water quality, and utility bills. Following the meeting, Village Trustee Ken Santowski wrote an e-mail to residents justifying his vote, arguing that "…the village would only lose face if the project fails…"[430] He went on to say "This project is far from a done deal."[431] Perhaps Mr. Santowski is the only one who sees it that way - the Continental Amateur Baseball Association (which calls itself "the greatest show on dirt") is already trying to attract teams with a video "flyover" of the planned facility, calling it the "new CABA complex."[432]

Several residents came away from the recent meeting frustrated. Tom Balboney of a nearby subdivision said "we feel all of this was done behind our backs,"[433] and Larry Larson, long time resident, summed it up for the local newspaper: "It stinks…if they had to use their own money, they wouldn't do it."[434]

68. Museum With 44 Annual Visitors Gets Funding for Bug Storage (Raleigh, NC) -$253,123

What is the best way to simultaneously preserve an insect collection, promote a haiku contest and produce bug baseball cards? Simple. A grant to the North Carolina State University Insect Museum. The museum boasts being an "internationally recognized resource for the study of insects and mites in North Carolina, the Southeastern United States, and, in several insect groups, the world."[435] The Museum, which has "virtually no public presence" (it gets about 44 visitors a year), will also use the money for outreach efforts.[436] It also hosts the annual Hexapod Haiku Challenge every March on its blog.[437] In 2008, the Insect Museum submitted a proposal for a National Science Foundation (NSF) Biological Research Collections grant, which the NSF declined.[438] Based on that same proposal, last year the NSF awarded the Insect Museum $253,123[439] in stimulus funds to purchase new cabinets, drawers, and units for its specimens and a new computer server and software.[440] Using stimulus funds, the Museum has started an "Insect of the Week" series on its website[441] and plans a physical presence at the Yates Mill Pond County Park.[442] In addition, for the yearly BugFest festival, the Museum will design and distribute "packs of baseball-style cards featuring North Carolina's native and fascinating insects (quote attached) [sic]. An image of the insect will be printed on the front, with statistics and information on the

back. This effort will help raise awareness of how insects contribute to our lives (focusing on positive contributions) and why natural history collections are critical to understanding and documenting biodiversity trends."[443]

69. Addiction Studies Program for Journalists (Winston-Salem, NC) - $266,505

Wake Forest University is using $266,505 in stimulus funds to continue its annual science education workshops for reporters.[444] "These workshops employ an interactive, problem-based format that engages the skills and knowledge of working journalists. Participants will have ample time to interact with program faculty — internationally known scientists, teachers of journalism, award-winning journalists from the print and broadcast media, and others who have made important contributions to the drug-abuse field."[445]

70. The American Museum of Ceramic Art (Pomona, CA) - $50,000

A museum in Pomona, California received $50,000 in stimulus money for an Administrative & Membership Manager and Assistant Curator.[446] "Exhibitions and programming at the American Museum of Ceramic Art will embrace a wide number of topics - all relating to clay. Within this broadly diverse community, it is their goal to increase the aesthetic appreciation of clay as an art form and to assist their audience in unraveling the creative thinking behind the making of ceramic objects. At the same time, AMOCA aims to provide confirmed clay enthusiasts with encouragement, camaraderie and exhibition opportunity."[447]

71. Bus Station Art (Los Angeles, CA) - $1 million

If you want to experience art in Los Angeles, look no further than the local bus stop. That's because transit agencies have been purchasing art for bus stops and train stations and for construction fences to "create[ ] a sense of place and engage [ ] transit riders."[448] Now the transit authority will use a portion of the just over $ 1 million of stimulus funds to purchase art for 19 bus stations along the Harbor and El Monte transit way "to enhance the customer experience," and to incorporate "unique artworks…designed to make transit a more attractive alternative."[449]

72. Studying Whether a Soda Tax Will Stimulate Health (Chicago, IL) - $521,005

The current administration has previously discussed taxing soda and other sugary drinks as "an idea we should be exploring."[450] While it is hard to disagree that soda and other sugary drinks are contributing factors to the national obesity epidemic, it is easy to disagree whether federal dollars should be used to study the relationship between taxes and obesity.[451] All the same, the University of Illinois received more than half a million dollars to do just that.[452]

73. Big Bang – Little Stimulus (Tucson, AZ) - $314,964

Researchers at the University of Arizona received over $300,000 in stimulus grant money to examine computer simulations to follow the formation of galaxies through the period 1-2 billion years after the Big Bang.[453] The grant will also help the principal investigator develop a course in astronomy for non-astronomy majors to be presented at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana.[454] So far, the project has created one-quarter of a job, according to reporting by the school.[455]

74. There's an App for That: Stimulus Funds for iPods (Salt Lake City, UT) - $1 million

"About 1,600 students at Kearns High School in Utah will get iPod touches next school year, thanks to a federal stimulus Enhancing Education Through Technology grant."[456] They will use the devices during class, take them home after school, and according to one student, get to keep them if they graduate on-time.[457] "I think that will be the coolest thing ever," said a student. "I think that might be a little initiative for those who are thinking of not graduating to graduate, kind of a going-away present."[458] "[T]eachers will be trained to use the iPods to engage students so their attention doesn't wander."[459]

75. The Meteorite Hunters of Antarctica (Cleveland, OH) - $600,001

In some parts of the country you have a better chance of seeing a meteor shower than getting a job. Case Western Reserve University received economic stimulus money to search Antarctica for space rocks through its Antarctic Search for Meteorites Program (ANSMET).[460] Since 1976, "ANSMET has recovered over 17,500 meteorite specimens from locations along the Transantarctic Mountains."[461] "But after more than 30 years of scouring Antarctica for meteorites, the easiest spots to reach have been picked over, requiring the ANSMET teams to go farther afield for specimens," according to the principal investigator.[462]

76. Field Trip to Study Dinosaur Eggs...in China (Bozeman, MT) - $141,002[463]

This past spring, nine students from Montana State University (MSU) were given a six-week, all-expense paid trip to China, funded by the National Science Foundation.[464] MSU received a grant to send students to work with researchers at the Natural History Museum in Hangzhou studying various dinosaur eggs and other fossils.[465] In a conversation with a local resident of Wuzhen, one of the students said "I told him that I was here to study dinosaur eggs. He replied with, 'Bloody hell! That's the sort of

thing you just can't make up!'"[466] While there, the students spent six weeks examining and cataloguing the eggs. As recorded on the group's blog, however, they were still able to take plenty of time to let their hair down hiking on the Great Wall, spending a day at the Xixi National Wetland Park, exploring several small towns, visiting the opera, and touring the Tiatai temples.[467] Not to worry though, according to one student blogger, "Believe it or not from previous blog posts, we have been hard at work doing research."[468]

77. Ice Skating Rinks Just Getting Warmed Up (Woodbury & Eagan, MN) - $1.8 million

When it comes to keeping the local ice rink up to date, Woodbury, Minnesota does not plan to just skate by. Woodbury has allocated more than $2.3 million[469] to upgrade its heating systems at a local ice rink, using $503,900 in stimulus funding.[470] Funding was provided by the Department of Energy through the energy efficiency block grant program to help install a geothermal heating and cooling system that would, among other things, "prevent heat from the roof from warming the ice surface," and "provide heat for the west rink spectators."[471] The City of Woodbury hired Harris Mechanical Services to study possible avenues for moving forward with the project.[472] Not surprisingly, the company came forward with a recommendation that it be hired to perform a $2.4 million retrofit for the Bielenberg Sports Center.[473] Harris was ultimately hired, but not before City Administrator Clinton Gridley noted that the project carried certain downsides, including that it "does not utilize the competitive bidding process" and "replaces equipment that has not reached its useful life span."[474] Harris was also able to land a similar deal in Eagan, Minnesota to install a geothermal heat pump for the ice rink in Eagan Civic Arena.[475] For this project, the Department of Energy contributed more than $1.3 million,[476] covering about a third of the project's overall cost.[477]

78. Helping Drinkers Control Their Alcohol Consumption With Creative Labeling (San Diego, CA) - $497,117[478]

Can people at bars be persuaded of the benefits of moderate drinking?[479] Researchers at San Diego State University think so, as they plan to spend almost half a million dollars to research whether better nutritional and alcohol content labeling will affect consumption of alcoholic beverages.[480] The research includes field experiments to test the "effectiveness of different disclosure strategies under various levels of natural drunkenness."[481] Indeed, according to one local columnist, "most of the research, not surprisingly, will be done in and around the university campus and the bars and nightclubs of Pacific Beach."[482]

Photo courtesy of San Diego Shooter

79. High-End Boutique Hotel Built Where None is Needed (Buffalo, NY) - $6 million

Visiting Manhattanites will feel right at home in Buffalo at a new chic downtown boutique hotel being built with the help of a $6 million tax-exempt bond backed by federal stimulus funds.[483] Local restaurateur Mark Croce is building a "true boutique hotel experience…as high-end as they come."[484] Unfortunately Buffalo's hotels have a history of dependence on subsidies and an even longer history of struggling financially. According to one local newspaper, "practically every hotel in and around downtown Buffalo was built with public subsidies, and most of them are treading water – at best."[485] The *Buffalo News* reported last year that, "For nearly 30 years, politicians have poured more than $65 million into downtown Buffalo hotels - an average of more than $50,000 per room. The strategy produced five hotels - and a lot of red ink."[486] There are plenty of folks who think downtown Buffalo has enough hotels. The former president of the local conventions bureau stated in 2008 that "based on the current market demand, [Buffalo has] a sufficient number of rooms in the downtown core."[487]

80. Wildlife Refuge Gets Fancy New Visitors Center (Bismarck, ND) - $6.1 million[488]

The almost 15,000-acre[489] Audubon National Wildlife Refuge, located about an hour north of Bismarck, North Dakota is visited by fewer than 80 people a day on average.[490] However, that hasn't prevented the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from spending over $6 million to build a new administration and visitor center for the refuge.[491] While the old building was over 50 years old, the new building will be built to special energy efficient specifications and will include a 1,038–square-foot multipurpose room and 884-square-foot exhibit hall.[492]

81. "Hot Glass—Cool Art" (Tacoma, WA) - $50,000

The Museum of Glass in Tacoma,[493] Washington received $50,000 in stimulus money to retain two part-time educational interpreters who will entertain visitors by explaining how glass is made in the museum's "hot shop."[494] One hot shop interpreter says of the job, "I get to watch glass get blown all day. It's a pretty sweet gig."[495] However, the Museum website notes that it may not be experiencing an economic hardship after all. "In this time of economic uncertainty, our attendance is on the rise, among both adults and school groups. There is increased traffic on our website and live stream of the Hot Shop."[496] The website also lists its current membership at 3,800 households[497] who pay anywhere between $50 and over $1000 in annual fees.[498] The Museum's fiscal year 2008 net assets are listed at approximately $29.6 million.[499]

82. False Start on Head Start (New Haven, CT) - $381,313

Perhaps the pre-schoolers were the ones in charge of accounting for tax dollars at the New Haven Head Start office. The New Haven Board of Education improperly allocated $510,000 and failed to comply with federal Head Start and Early Head Start performance standards, including one on health screenings of children, according to a recent report from the Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.[500] The report further found that the board met only three of the six performance standards reviewed, and that the deficiencies were largely due to inadequate procedures and accounting systems.[501]

83. Bureaucracy Gives Low-Income Housing Luxury Costs (Rochester, NY) - $3.3 million

One of north Rochester's poorest and most crime-riddled neighborhoods is getting an expensive facelift, with 23 new homes built with stimulus money. In the El Camino Estates development along Conkey Avenue, the median value of existing houses are less than $50,000.[502] The new stimulus funded neighboring houses will cost six times that to build. At an average cost of $300,000, the 23 new houses being built for rental to low-income families range from 1,200 to 1,700 square feet, a mere fraction of the space the same dollar amount would buy in some of Rochester's wealthiest suburbs.[503] Why the high cost for low-income rental properties in such a rough part of town? According to the developers and the non-profit community development corporation they are working with, it is the red tape that comes from the combination of tax credits, state and local money, federal stimulus dollars and a large bureaucratic mess.[504]

84. Stimulus Funds Going to the Dogs (Ithaca, NY)[505] - $296,385

Cornell University scientists have received $296,385 in stimulus funds to study "dog domestication."[506] Researchers believe that there is common understanding of where dogs descended from, but the progression from there to Lassie "is poorly understood."[507] They point out that much of the research "has focused on breed dogs, but the diverse populations of semi-feral 'village' dogs are likely an important key for understanding dog domestication."[508] A previous Cornell study found that North Africa was probably the origin of dog domestication.[509] In that study, the scientists examined the genetic markers of 318 African dogs and then performed the same test on mixed breed American dogs and street dogs in Puerto Rico.[510] The new study "will likely to [sic] challenge current theories of dog origins and develop village dogs into a useful system for the study of domestication, speciation, behavior and morphology."[511]

85. Let's Polka at the International Accordion Festival! (San Antonio, TX) - $25,000

The 2009 International Accordion Festival in San Antonio, Texas received a $25,000 grant[512] for an event it promised would be "simply amazing" and a "celebration of all things squeezebox."[513]

Visitors got to experience the "hippest and most happening accordion music from around the world . . . [and] [e]njoy performances, workshops, open mics and jam sessions on multiple stages with the finest accordionists in the planet."[514] While the Festival has grown in popularity over the years, it has fallen under some criticism for getting tax dollars in a time of tight budgets. Defending the Festival, organizer Pat Jasper shot back at what she perceived to be a wrongheaded anti-accordion bias, "The expression of disdain for accordions pins [critics] for what they are, which is cultural elites."[515]

86. Preserve and Rehabilitate FDR's Home (Hyde Park, NY) - $4.6 million

The National Park Service has awarded $4,572,000 for repairs on Franklin D. Roosevelt's Hyde Park, New York residence and carriage house.[516] According to the National Park Service, repairs will include painting the shutters the home's original shade of hunter green and removing trees to be "replaced with historic varieties."[517] FDR's home, however, has in recent years received over $19 million in additional funding for renovations,[518] surely making it one of the most expensive home projects in history.

87. Study: Does Retirement Help or Hurt Marriage? (Los Angeles, CA) - $174,661

Is it better to retire and spend more time with your spouse, or just keep working? Researchers at UCLA are pursuing the answer to this question with a $174,661 grant from the National Institute on Aging.[519] They plan to study the correlation between couples transitioning into retirement, the health of their marriage, and the resulting effect on their physiological health. Participants will be subject to two laboratory assessments once before and after retirement that will examine their marital and physical health including "discussions about retirement and problems in the relationship."[520] Sixty couples over the age of 60 who are expecting to retire in the near term will participate in the study.[521]

88. Army Corps of Engineers Cleaning Up Their Act in West Virginia (Burnsville, WV) - $650,000

At Burnsville Dam in West Virginia, the Army Corps of Engineers is spending stimulus funds for a company to clean its bathrooms, offices and the campgrounds.[522] Air Maids LLC out of Troy, Ohio was awarded a contract for up to $650,000 for restroom cleaning and other grounds services.[523] Work is taking place at the Bulltown Campground and Corps offices at the Burnsville Dam in West Virginia.[524] So far, almost $50,000 in invoices for this work have been paid for with stimulus funds out of the Corps' Civil Works program.[525] Across the nation, the Corps of Engineers has been funding much more substantial repairs and equipment upgrade priorities through its Civil Work program.[526]

89. Coordinating Traffic Lights (Sebring, FL) - $1.1 million

Nothing is more annoying than hitting every red light. The Florida Energy and Climate Commission, created by the governor of Florida in 2008,[527] has given the Highlands County Commission more than a million dollar grant to do something about just that problem.[528] The Commission is installing a fiber-optic cable so that 14 traffic lights are better coordinated, thus reducing fuel emissions from vehicles on the road.[529] The county engineer told a reporter that the lights are "already hard-wired, but [this] will make [them] better."[530]

90. Agency Fails to Target Counties with Highest Unemployment - $145 million

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), misdirected much of a $145 million allotment it received for watershed operations and flood protection projects, according to the Agency's Inspector General.[531] Under the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*, all federal agencies were supposed to prioritize funding for counties that were the most financially distressed and "to assist those most impacted by the recession."[532] Despite saying that regional unemployment was a factor in choosing projects, NRCS allocated about $59 million for 75 projects to counties with unemployment below the national average.[533] For example, a flood control project for Mush Creek for Dallas County in Alabama, an area with 18 percent unemployment, was dropped, while other counties with employment well below the national average got their projects, the USDA Inspector General reported.[534]

91. Health Insurance Grants go Unused (Washington, DC) - $142 million

The *Recovery Act* designated $150 million for use by the Department of Labor's Health Coverage Tax Credit (HCTC) National Emergency Grants (NEG) program,[535] though much of it may not have had the intended effect. The program pays for up to 80 percent of health insurance coverage for eligible Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) participants[536] and Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) recipients until they are able to get their coverage through the IRS' HCTC program.[537] The Employment and Training Administration (ETA) is responsible for administering the program. As the number of TAA eligible Americans ballooned to 201,000 and eligible PBGC retirees at 744,000 in 2009, only six states took advantage of the HCTC program through three grants for just $8 million.[538] Why were so few eligible individuals being served by the program? Because as the Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General reported in March, over thirty percent of states were never aware of the program.[539] While the ETA did make some outreach efforts to the states, they were largely ineffective and as a result funds were not spent quickly, as intended by the *Recovery Act*. At the end of the day, the American taxpayers were on the hook for $142 million of duplicative efforts that those eligible to receive were never even told about.

92. Whistleblower Alleges Fraud at Company Administering Child Care Funds (Kilgore, TX) - $215 million

A whistleblower has alleged that a large government contractor may have fraudulently used stimulus money to evade federal rules in a program to help working parents pay for child care.[540] The *Recovery Act* included over $2 billion for Child Care and Development Funds (CCDF), which allows states to provide free or subsidized child care to working parents.[541] By accepting stimulus grant awards, however, the states are prohibited from supplanting state child care funds.[542] In Texas, which received $214,900,000, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)[543] partnered with both local governments and outside organizations. In Smith County, it worked with the East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG) and Arbor Res-Care, which the whistleblower alleged misused stimulus funding. The lawsuit filed in Smith County alleges that caseworkers at Arbor Res-Care were instructed to wrongfully use ARRA funds to supplant CCDF funds. According to the suit, within a month of beginning the ARRA-funded program, caseworkers realized that parents did not want to participate in the program if federal rules were followed—and so the rules were not followed. Caseworkers also allegedly realized that and Arbor Res-Care and the ETCOG would not be able to spend the money they had been allocated in time, so caseworkers were told to use stimulus money for all applicants, which was strictly prohibited.[544] Tyler Kioko, an accountant for Res Care, took a decidedly negative view of the situation as well, noting, "They were moving funds – they were using ARRA money to pay for things they were not supposed to pay for … They were trying to play with numbers to keep units to meet their budget targets."[545]

93. NIH Spends Stimulus Money to Promote the Impact of Its Stimulus Projects (Silver Spring, MD) - $363,760[546]

When does a federal project cross the line from simple self-promotion into propaganda? Palladian Partners Inc. of Silver Spring, Maryland was awarded $363,760 to promote the good things being done with stimulus money by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).[547] The project requires Palladian to develop "web-based real life stories that underscore job and infrastructure creation and accelerated ARRA research findings."[548] Indeed, interested citizens can go to the NIH *Recovery Act* website and learn about the $12.2 million stimulus grant NIH is spending on "Facebook for Scientists"[549] and another story on how "Researchers Pull in Big Bucks Under Recovery Act."[550]

94. Restored Lighthouse Gets More Funding for More Restoration (Jupiter, FL) - $442,950[551]

While the Jupiter Inlet National Historic Lighthouse is 150 years old, at least one local preservationist may have an exaggerated sense of its importance. James D. Snyder, Board Chairman of the Loxahatchee River Historical Society said about a recent sesquicentennial event for the lighthouse, it " celebrates our unique 5,000-year-old history."[552] The lighthouse in Florida was recently designated an outstanding natural area.[553] Local officials complained that, despite this new designation, there was no funding to go along with it.[554] That is, until the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) awarded the Loxahatchee River Historical Society two stimulus grants for building and habitat restoration.[555] But according to the BLM, the lighthouse went through a complete $858,000 restoration beginning in 1999.[556] According to the Historical Society, the stimulus funds for building restoration will be split between interior painting and restoration of a small building next door to the lighthouse that was formerly used as a workshop and Coast Guard housing.[557]

Photo courtesy of Larry Myhre

95. A Better Way to Freeze Rat DNA (Columbia, MO) - $180,935

For many years, scientists have found laboratory rats to be good test subjects for studying human disease. One problem, however, is that once you deep-freeze rat sperm, it apparently becomes less useful when unfrozen. Solution: study the freezing process for rat sperm. Calling it an "urgent need,"[558] scientists at the University of Missouri received stimulus funds "to develop freezing protocols for epididymal rat sperm which would allow reconstitution of genetics by using standard artificial insemination and in-

vitro fertilization methods."[559] The scientists note that "[o]ver the last few years, our laboratory has generated ample amount of data related with optimal sperm handling."[560]

96. Money for Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control to Ineligible Recipients - $2.8 million

A January 2010 audit by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Inspector General revealed that more than $5.7 million in stimulus funds were improperly awarded by the Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control (OHHLHC).[561] For example, the City of Greenville, North Carolina and Healthy Homes Resources received $1.9 million and $874,821, respectively, even though they did not meet the required application thresholds to receive funding.[562] The audit determined that the "OHHLHC did not have adequate controls to ensure that only qualified applicants were selected to receive grant funds."[563] One of the HUD Inspector General's recommendations was for the Director of OHHLHC to rescind the money and award the funds to qualified applicants.[564] The Director of OHHLHC did not concur with this recommendation for the City of Greenville, but agreed to rescind the remaining unobligated balance on the Healthy Homes Resources grant.[565]

97. The Wheels on the Stimulus Go Round and Round (Clearfield, PA) - $1.4 million

Fullington Auto Bus Company provides luxury tours to destinations such as Penn State football games, and has recently been the recipient of more than a million dollars in stimulus funding.[566] The company plans to purchase a brand new 57-passenger luxury bus to add to its 50 luxury motorcoach fleet;[567] the new luxury bus is expected to transport passengers from Harrisburg to a handful of small towns across the state of Pennsylvania.[568] Carrying a $500,000 price tag, the bus local officials touted as the "future of intercity transportation" has seatbelts, electrical outlets, Wi-Fi, personally controlled airvents, and closing overhead storage bins available for use.[569] Approximately 80 percent of the funds used for the bus came from stimulus dollars awarded to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.[570] Fullington Trailways also received a $1 million stimulus award from the Department of Transportation of neighboring state New York.[571] In recent years, the company has been on the receiving end of anti-terrorism grants from the Department of Homeland Security in excess of $200,000[572] to install GPS tracking systems in all of the buses.[573]

98. Artists Get New Digs (Wilton, CT and Philadelphia, PA) - $184,650

The National Park Service (NPS) and the City of Philadelphia love their artists. So much so, they combined to spend over half a million dollars to provide them with artistic space. At the Weir Farm in Wilton, $184,650 is going to turn what local media describe as "an old garage" into an Art Studio to be used for personal or professional work by artists participating in the Weir Farm's "Artist-in-Residence" program.[574] Despite public

funding, the NPS superintendant at the facility said the issue of visitor access to the studio had not yet been decided.[575] Less than 150 miles away just down Interstate-95, Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter awarded over $500,000 through the Creative Industry Workforce Grants program.[576] Eight Philadelphia arts-related organizations received various amounts of the money, with over half of it going toward "artist workspace."[577]

99. What's With the Lights? (Euless, TX) – $454,200

The sport of softball recently celebrated its 122nd anniversary,[578] but playing in the glow of stimulus funded lights – now that's something completely new. The City of Euless, Texas earmarked almost half a million dollars in federal stimulus funds received from an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant[579] for the replacement of ball field lighting at its Softball World facility.[580] The facility hosts games and tournaments most nights and charges teams entry fees.[581] One would think that the teams using the fields should just pay higher fees for the light renovations instead of the American taxpayer, most of whom will never see Euless, Texas, no matter how bright the new lights are.

100. Alcohol Studies Summer School for High School and College Students (New York, NY) - $112,437

In a time when jobs are hard to come by, several high school and college students have gotten federal funding to inspire their scientific curiosity. Columbia University received $112,437 to provide summer research experiences in the field of alcohol epidemiology for three high school students and three college students.[582] One of the goals of the program is to "inspire the students' scientific curiosity by allowing them to visit cutting-edge laboratories and hospital operating rooms."[583]

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