



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on December 23, 2010

“Cow Burp” Researchers Have a Beef With Government Waste Report

Scientists conducting research at taxpayers' expense are, says ABC News, “outraged” over the fact that Sen. Tom Coburn’s Wastebook 2010 characterized their work as a study of “cow burps.” The Oklahoma Republican’s report on wasteful federal spending described the \$700,000 Department of Agriculture-sponsored project as a study of “greenhouse gas emission from organic dairies, which are cause [sic] by cow burps, among other things.” It quoted the principal researcher of the project from a newspaper report: “Cows emit most of their methane through belching, only a small fraction from flatulence.”



“Scientists at the University of New Hampshire say Coburn has cherry picked quotes and taken things out of context in an effort to undermine their research,” ABC News writes. “They say the project’s findings will not only help the environment, but also farmers and businesses involved in the dairy industry.”

John Aber, an environmental scientist and provost of the University of New Hampshire, argued strenuously against Coburn’s characterization of the study, telling ABC News that it “is a caricature of the research based on a few words or phrases for political gain.” Aber described the research as “a far more sophisticated look at how different toxic chemicals, particularly nitrogen, produced by dairy farming can be mitigated to reduce greenhouse gases.” He added further that the research “was not funded by earmarks,” is “important,” and is “not wasteful.”

Of course, that’s easy for him to say since other people are footing the bill, under duress, for his research. Would Aber think that forcing him to pay for his neighbor’s new roof, which is undoubtedly “important” and “not wasteful” as far as the neighbor is concerned, is a good use of his money?

Furthermore, there is a little thing called the U.S. Constitution that specifies the ways in which Congress can expend the taxes collected by the U.S. Treasury. Nowhere among those enumerated powers is the funding of scientific research. Therefore, whether the research is funded through an earmark (it isn’t, and Coburn’s report did not say it was) or through some other process, it is still outside the authority of the federal government to spend money for that purpose in the first place.

There is also the matter of whether so-called greenhouse gases are really something with which humans ought to be concerned. The ABC News report states flatly that “greenhouse gas emissions” are “the chemicals associated with global warming.” This assumes, of course, that there is such a thing as “global warming,” an assumption called into serious question by everything from “Climategate” to the ongoing worldwide record cold temperatures.

If Aber really believes his research is worthwhile, let him pay for it himself or find private donors —



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e.g., the “farmers and businesses involved in the dairy industry” that will supposedly benefit from the study — to cover the cost. Shivering taxpayers should not be milked to pay for this load of “global warming” bull.



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