



Sen. Coburn's Report Exposes DOD's Wasteful, Non-Defense Spending

Following his office's publishing of his annual [Wastebook](#) last month, Senator Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) has now released another oversight report, this one exploring waste and "non-defense" spending in the Department of Defense (DOD), entitled the "[Department of Everything](#)."

In his *Wastebook* Coburn concluded that "all the outrageous and wasteful contents of this report were made possible by either the action or lack of action of Congress, earning it the well-deserved but unwanted distinction as the biggest waste of taxpayer money in 2012." Right behind the Congress, however, is the Department of Defense, which has been spending taxpayer monies on projects, programs, and plans not related to the DOD's primary function: defending the Republic.



Although he thinks potential savings could exceed \$70 billion over the next 10 years if all of his suggestions were implemented, he also says that his report has just skimmed the surface, and savings could be much larger. [He stated](#),

I prepared this report because the American people expect the Pentagon's \$600 billion annual budget to go toward our nation's defense.

That isn't happening. Billions of defense dollars are being spent on programs and missions that have little or nothing to do with national security, or are already being performed by other government agencies. Spending more on grocery stores than guns doesn't make any sense. And using defense dollars to run microbreweries, study Twitter slang, create beef jerky, or examine Star Trek does nothing to defend our nation.

These are actual programs he and his staff uncovered by asking three simple questions:

- Does the mission of this program or agency directly relate to the mission of the Department of Defense?
- Does another federal agency or government or private entity already provide the services provided by this program or agency?
- Could these resources be better targeted towards higher priority defense needs, such as taking care of troops on the front lines or reducing our \$16 trillion national debt?

What he and his staff found was merely a smattering, a skimming, a "starting point for reviewing Pentagon spending that is unnecessary, wasteful or simply not related to defense." He calls this



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wasteful spending a “rising tide of the red [ink] menace.” Here is some of what they uncovered:

\$6 billion spent on non-military research and development. These are research projects that have little or nothing to do with national defense, according to the report.

\$15.2 billion spent on education. These include programs to educate children of military families in the US, as well as programs that duplicate the work of the Department of Education and local school districts. It also includes college funding for military members on active duty and duplicates the work of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

\$700 million spent on developing “alternative energy.” This includes duplicative and unnecessary alternative energy research being done by the Department of Energy.

\$9 billion spent on supporting stateside grocery stores. This includes Pentagon-run grocery stores here in the United States.

\$37 billion spent on “overhead, support and supply service” unrelated to the DOD’s primary purpose. This includes more than 300,000 members of the military service performing civilian-type jobs.

For example, the DOD invested part of its budget in more than 100 renewable energy-related projects in 2010, even more than the Department of Energy itself, and with similar results: “Many of these DOD renewable energy projects were so poorly planned, they failed to be cost effective or even produce [any] power, wasting millions of national security dollars.”

The DOD duplicated work done by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), doing research “into the very same diseases already being studied by [them].”

The DOD also duplicated work done by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). From the report:

For example, the Navy recently funded research examining what the behavior of fish can teach us about democracy while also developing an app to alert iPhone users when the best time is to take a coffee break.

The Air Force Office of Scientific Research funded a study last year examining how to make it easier to produce silk from wild [silkworm] cocoons in Africa and South America.

Both the Navy and the Air Force funded a study that concluded people in New York use different jargon on Twitter than those living in California.

And the DOD is willing to share its “expertise” in naming streams, mountains, hills, and plains across the country. Officials from the department are serving on the Board of Geographic Names, with one of them serving as vice-chairman.

It also is making sure that local school children are getting their fruits and vegetables:

The Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) has provided fresh fruits and vegetables to local schools in coordination with the Department of Agriculture through a program called DOD Fresh for nearly twenty years, spending more than \$66 million in Fiscal Year 2010 [alone].

And the DOD sponsored a “Grill It Safe” cooking video featuring two “Grill” sergeants illustrating their own special “delicious recipes suitable for cooking outdoors.”

It goes on: The DOD owns and operates its own microbreweries and liquor stores and sponsors



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motivational talks such as “The Everest Challenge” where outside speakers bring messages “about how to overcome the obstacles in life.” There’s a “ropes” course designed to foster “communication, trust and social/emotional learning skills,” and “Adventure Dynamics,” a one-day class at Camp Murray which “fosters the development and understanding of three important human skills: commitment, self-confidence and teamwork.”

While it may be argued that such training might be helpful in some way for members of the military, these courses were for *state and local police officers*. Said the report: “It is not clear why the Department of Defense should use its resources to pay for...non-military local law enforcement.”

As outrageous some of these programs may be, what’s particularly annoying is that, even if each of these programs were reined in or eliminated altogether, the savings would only amount to [about one percent of the DOD’s budget](#). Who knows what else could be cut if empire-building wars were ended and troop deployments (still in place 68 years after the end of the Second World War) were returned home? As recently as the year 2000, the DOD budget was half what it is today. Bringing it back into line would free up \$300 billion annually to apply against the national debt.

Maybe Coburn’s report will begin the conversation about just what the DOD’s role ought to be.



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