**50 Examples of Government Waste**

**Six Categories of Waste**

The six categories of wasteful and unnecessary spending are:

1. Programs that should be devolved to state and local governments;
2. Programs that could be better performed by the private sector;
3. Mistargeted programs whose recipients should not be entitled to government benefits;
4. Outdated and unnecessary programs;
5. Duplicative programs; and
6. Inefficiency, mismanagement, and fraud.

The first four categories are generally subjective, and reasonable people can disagree on whether a given federal program falls under their purview. Yet the final two categories -- duplication and inefficiency, mismanagement, and fraud -- are comparatively easy to identify and oppose. Thus, they are heavily represented in the examples of government waste below:

1. The federal government made at least **$72 billion** in improper payments in 2008.[[1]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn1)
2. Washington spends **$92 billion** on corporate welfare (excluding TARP) versus $71 billion on homeland security.[[2]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn2)
3. Washington spends **$25 billion** annually maintaining unused or vacant federal properties.[[3]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn3)
4. Government auditors spent the past five years examining all federal programs and found that 22 percent of them -- costing taxpayers a total of **$123 billion** annually -- fail to show any positive impact on the populations they serve.[[4]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn4)
5. The Congressional Budget Office published a "Budget Options" series identifying more than **$100 billion** in potential spending cuts.[[5]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn5)
6. Examples from multiple Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports of wasteful duplication include **342** economic development programs; **130** programs serving the disabled; **130** programs serving at-risk youth; **90** early childhood development programs; **75** programs funding international education, cultural, and training exchange activities; and **72** safe water programs.[[6]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn6)
7. Washington will spend **$2.6 million** training Chinese prostitutes to drink more responsibly on the job.[[7]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn7)
8. A GAO audit classified **nearly half of all purchases** on government credit cards as improper, fraudulent, or embezzled. Examples of taxpayer-funded purchases include gambling, mortgage payments, liquor, lingerie, iPods, Xboxes, jewelry, Internet dating services, and Hawaiian vacations. In one extraordinary example, the Postal Service spent **$13,500** on one dinner at a Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, including "over 200 appetizers and over $3,000 of alcohol, including more than 40 bottles of wine costing more than $50 each and brand-name liquor such as Courvoisier, Belvedere and Johnny Walker Gold." The 81 guests consumed an average of $167 worth of food and drink apiece.[[8]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn8)
9. Federal agencies are delinquent on nearly 20 percent of employee travel charge cards, costing taxpayers **hundreds of millions of dollars** annually.[[9]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn9)
10. The Securities and Exchange Commission spent **$3.9 million** rearranging desks and offices at its Washington, D.C., headquarters.[[10]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn10)
11. The Pentagon recently spent **$998,798** shipping two 19-cent washers from South Carolina to Texas and **$293,451** sending an 89-cent washer from South Carolina to Florida.[[11]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn11)
12. **Over half of all farm subsidies** go to commercial farms, which report average household incomes of $200,000.[[12]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn12)
13. Health care fraud is estimated to cost taxpayers more than **$60 billion** annually.[[13]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn13)
14. A GAO audit found that 95 Pentagon weapons systems suffered from a combined **$295 billion** in cost overruns.[[14]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn14)
15. The refusal of many federal employees to fly coach costs taxpayers **$146 million** annually in flight upgrades.[[15]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn15)
16. Washington will spend **$126 million** in 2009 to enhance the Kennedy family legacy in Massachusetts. Additionally, Senator John Kerry (D-MA) diverted $20 million from the 2010 defense budget to subsidize a new Edward M. Kennedy Institute.[[16]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn16)
17. Federal investigators have launched more than **20 criminal fraud investigations** related to the TARP financial bailout.[[17]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn17)
18. Despite trillion-dollar deficits, last year's 10,160 earmarks included **$200,000** for a tattoo removal program in Mission Hills, California; **$190,000** for the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming; and **$75,000** for the Totally Teen Zone in Albany, Georgia.[[18]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn18)
19. The federal government owns more than **50,000 vacant homes**.[[19]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn19)
20. The Federal Communications Commission spent **$350,000** to sponsor NASCAR driver David Gilliland.[[20]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn20)
21. Members of Congress have spent **hundreds of thousands** of taxpayer dollars supplying their offices with popcorn machines, plasma televisions, DVD equipment, ionic air fresheners, camcorders, and signature machines -- plus **$24,730** leasing a Lexus, **$1,434** on a digital camera, and **$84,000** on personalized calendars.[[21]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn21)
22. More than **$13 billion** in Iraq aid has been classified as wasted or stolen. Another **$7.8 billion** cannot be accounted for.[[22]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn22)
23. Fraud related to Hurricane Katrina spending is estimated to top **$2 billion**. In addition, debit cards provided to hurricane victims were used to pay for Caribbean vacations, NFL tickets, Dom Perignon champagne, "Girls Gone Wild" videos, and at least one sex change operation.[[23]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn23)
24. Auditors discovered that **900,000** of the 2.5 million recipients of emergency Katrina assistance provided false names, addresses, or Social Security numbers or submitted multiple applications.[[24]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn24)
25. Congress recently gave Alaska Airlines **$500,000** to paint a Chinook salmon on a Boeing 737.[[25]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn25)
26. The Transportation Department will subsidize up to **$2,000 per flight** for direct flights between Washington, D.C., and the small hometown of Congressman Hal Rogers (R-KY) -- but only on Monday mornings and Friday evenings, when lawmakers, staff, and lobbyists usually fly. Rogers is a member of the Appropriations Committee, which writes the Transportation Department's budget.[[26]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn26)
27. Washington has spent **$3 billion** re-sanding beaches -- even as this new sand washes back into the ocean.[[27]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn27)
28. A Department of Agriculture report concedes that much of the **$2.5 billion** in "stimulus" funding for broadband Internet will be wasted.[[28]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn28)
29. The Defense Department wasted **$100 million** on unused flight tickets and never bothered to collect refunds even though the tickets were refundable.[[29]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn29)
30. Washington spends **$60,000 per hour** shooting Air Force One photo-ops in front of national landmarks.[[30]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn30)
31. Over one recent 18-month period, Air Force and Navy personnel used government-funded credit cards to charge at least **$102,400** on admission to entertainment events, **$48,250** on gambling, **$69,300** on cruises, and **$73,950** on exotic dance clubs and prostitutes.[[31]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn31)
32. Members of Congress are set to pay themselves **$90 million** to increase their franked mailings for the 2010 election year.[[32]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn32)
33. Congress has ignored efficiency recommendations from the Department of Health and Human Services that would save **$9 billion** annually.[[33]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn33)
34. Taxpayers are funding paintings of high-ranking government officials at a cost of up to **$50,000 apiece**.[[34]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn34)
35. The state of Washington sent $1 food stamp checks to 250,000 households in order to raise state caseload figures and trigger **$43 million** in additional federal funds.[[35]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn35)
36. Suburban families are receiving large **farm subsidies for the grass in their backyards** -- subsidies that many of these families never requested and do not want. [[36]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn36)
37. Congress appropriated **$20 million** for "commemoration of success" celebrations related to Iraq and Afghanistan.[[37]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn37)
38. Homeland Security employee purchases include 63-inch plasma TVs, iPods, and **$230** for a beer brewing kit.[[38]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn38)
39. Two drafting errors in the 2005 Deficit Reduction Act resulted in a **$2 billion** taxpayer cost.[[39]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn39)
40. North Ridgeville, Ohio, received **$800,000** in "stimulus" funds for a project that its mayor described as "a long way from the top priority."[[40]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn40)
41. The National Institutes of Health spends **$1.3 million** per month to rent a lab that it cannot use.[[41]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn41)
42. Congress recently spent **$2.4 billion** on 10 new jets that the Pentagon insists it does not need and will not use.[[42]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn42)
43. Lawmakers diverted **$13 million** from Hurricane Katrina relief spending to build a museum celebrating the Army Corps of Engineers -- the agency partially responsible for the failed levees that flooded New Orleans.[[43]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn43)
44. Medicare officials recently mailed **$50 million** in erroneous refunds to 230,000 Medicare recipients.[[44]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn44)
45. Audits showed **$34 billion** worth of Department of Homeland Security contracts contained significant waste, fraud, and abuse.[[45]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn45)
46. Washington recently spent **$1.8 million** to help build a private golf course in Atlanta, Georgia.[[46]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn46)
47. The Advanced Technology Program spends **$150 million** annually subsidizing private businesses; 40 percent of this funding goes to Fortune 500 companies.[[47]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn47)
48. Congressional investigators were able to receive **$55,000** in federal student loan funding for a fictional college they created to test the Department of Education.[[48]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn48)
49. The Conservation Reserve program pays farmers **$2 billion** annually not to farm their land.[[49]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn49)
50. The Commerce Department has **lost 1,137 computers** since 2001, many containing Americans' personal data.[[50]](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/10/50-Examples-of-Government-Waste" \l "_edn50)