Summertime Blues

Senator Tom Coburn, M.D.

Senator John McCain

100 stimulus projects that give taxpayers the blues

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

Table of Contents

Introduction....4

1. Forest Service to Replace Windows in Visitor Center Closed in 2007 (Amboy, WA) - $554,763....5
2. "Dance Draw" - Interactive Dance Software Development (Charlotte, NC) - $762,372....6
3. North Shore Connector to Professional Sports Stadiums, Casino (Pittsburgh, PA) - $62 million....7
4. FEMA Stalls Two Texas Fire Stations More Than a Year, Increases Costs (San Antonio, TX) - $7.3 million....9
5. Abandoned Train Station Converted Into Museum (Glassboro, NJ) - $1.2 million....10
6. Ants Talk. Taxpayers Listen (San Francisco, CA) - $1.9 million....11
7. Stimulus Project Threatens Pastor's House (Newark, OH) - $1.8 million....12
8. Old Abandoned Iron Furnace Gets Facelift after Money Squandered on Same Project Years Before (Fitchburg, KY) – $357,710....14
9. Power Plant Construction Won't Start for at Least Two Years (Kern County, CA) - $308 million....15
10. Town Replaces New Sidewalks With Newer Sidewalks That Lead to Ditch (Boynton, OK) - $89,298....16

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]

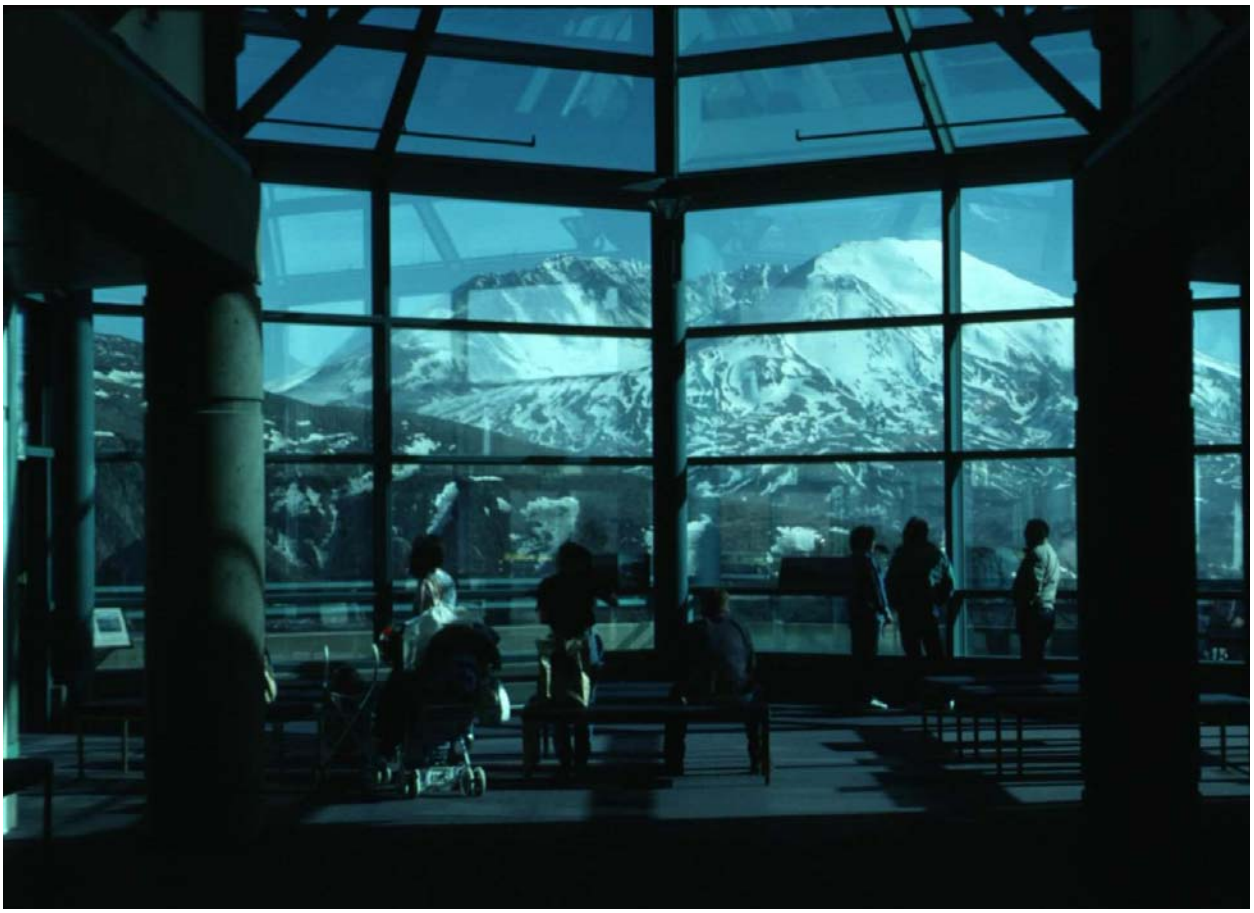


Photo courtesy of National Park Service

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

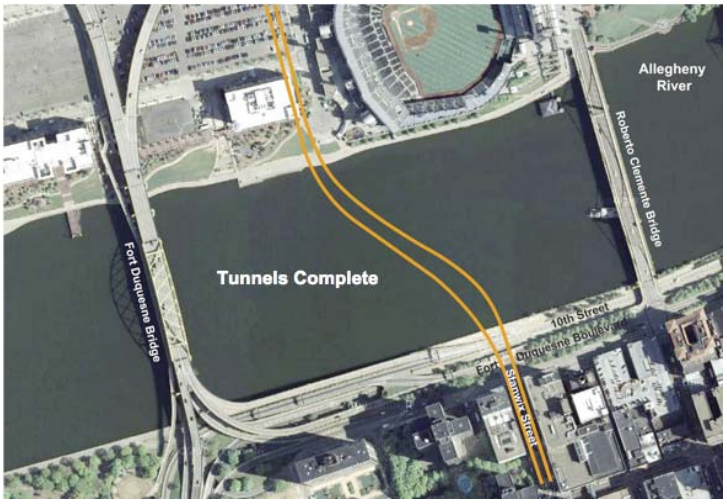
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte received more than $750,000 in stimulus funds to help develop a computerized choreography program that its creators believe could lead to a YouTube-like "Dance Tube" online application.[10] The grant says UNC-Charlotte will "define an evolving system that 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]