



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on December 23, 2011

Senator Tom Coburn's Annual "Wastebook" Just Released

Of the 100 projects covered, three are especially egregious, and reflect the "spend spend spend" mentality prevalent in the halls of Congress. "The Super Bridge to Nowhere" in Alaska is [one](#) of [two](#) projected bridges which became notorious during the 2008 presidential campaign.



The Knik Arm Bridge is designed to connect residents in the southern part of the Matanuska/Susitna Valley, or "MatSu," with Anchorage, which would save them an hour's driving time each way. The bridge would be 2.7 miles long and cost between \$650 and \$700 million (some estimates are much higher). The only problem is that there are very few residents living in MatSu, hence the bridge is named in Coburn's report. Coburn complained, "At least \$15.3 million was spent on the project this year alone. In total, more than \$65 million in federal taxpayer money has been directed to various aspects of the project, including \$57,390 for a 14-minute video, 'The Knik Arm Crossing: Bridge to Our Future.' "

And \$1 million of that money was spent just for staff salaries to promote the project.

The other bridge, The Gravina Island Bridge, is the one that got vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin in trouble, with her initially supporting the project while running for Governor of Alaska and then later opposing it while running for Vice President with John McCain in 2008.

However, it wasn't only Palin who got into trouble. In 2005 Coburn himself offered an amendment to remove funds totally from the two bridges. But he didn't want to keep the funds in the U.S. Treasury or return them to the aforementioned taxpayers. No, he wanted to spend them elsewhere on another "worthwhile" government boondoggle: to repair the bridge over Lake Ponchartrain that was damaged by Hurricane Katrina. (His amendment was defeated overwhelmingly.) So critics note that Coburn himself qualifies as one of the big government spenders he decries in his report. He also qualifies as a luke-warm conservative with a score of just 72 percent in *The New American's* ["Freedom Index"](#) in the current Congress to date.

A second item brought out by Coburn's report was the revelation that the federal government spent more than \$120 million last year sending benefit checks to former government employees who were dead. The Inspector General for the U.S. Office of Personnel Management found that "the amount of post-death improper payments is consistently \$100-150 million annually, totaling over \$600 million in the last five years." Coburn's report noted a specific instance where "The IG found an annuitant's son



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[who had] cashed his dead father's checks for 37 years. The son's scheme, which cost taxpayers more than \$500,000, was discovered in 2008, when he himself died."

A third example that defies belief is the foreign aid that the United States provides to its biggest lender: China. In 2011 alone, the US sent \$18 million to China for "social services" and "programs to improve China's environment." As Coburn acidly noted: "China can better afford to fund these programs than the United States."

These three are just the tip of the iceberg. Others noted in detail are "Politicians Partying on the Taxpayer's Dime," "Subsidy Program for Small Airports...to Achieve Sustainable Air Service," "Paying for Pancakes," and "Extreme Home Makeover: Federal Highway Funds.... Transform [an] Abandoned 'Rock House' into [a] Visitors Center."

Even if all 100 of these leaks were plugged, observers note that it would scarcely make a dent in the country's \$15 trillion national debt. It wouldn't even slow it down. Daniel Horowitz observed in his RedState.com [blog](#): "At some point we will need to go beyond merely cutting waste, fraud and abuse. We will eventually have to wind down the welfare state and close government departments and agencies. However, there is no reason we shouldn't demand an immediate bipartisan effort to eliminate programs that are just plain dumb, even according to Democrat socialist ideology."

Photo: Sen. Tom Colburn



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