



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on December 17, 2013

Senator Tom Coburn Releases 2013 “Wastebook”

In a [press release](#) Tuesday, Senator Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) announced the publication of his annual “Wastebook,” which highlights Congress’ “most egregious spending” while at the same time distancing himself from the big spenders and ear-markers in Congress who provided fodder for his book:



While politicians in Washington spent much of 2013 complaining about sequestration’s impact on domestic programs and our national defense, we still managed to provide benefits to the Fort Hood shooter, study romance novels, help the State Department buy Facebook fans and even help NASA study Congress....

What’s lacking is the common sense and courage in Washington to make those choices — and passage of fiscally-responsible bills — possible.

Coburn then provided some teasers out of the 100 examples in his “Wastebook”:

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The Popular Romance Project has received nearly \$1 million from the National Endowment of the Humanities (NEH) since 2010 to “explore the fascinating, often contradictory origins and influences of popular romance as told in novels, films, comics, advice books, songs and internet fan fiction....

The military has destroyed more than 170 million pounds worth of useable vehicles and other military equipment [in Afghanistan] ... rather than sell it or ship it back home....

In January, 2013, Congress passed a bill to provide \$60.4 billion for [victims of] Hurricane Sandy. However, instead of rushing aid to the people who need it most, state-level officials ... spent [\$65 million of it] on tourism-related TV ads....

Since NASA is no longer conducting space flights, they have plenty of time and money to fund ... the “Green Ninja” in which a man dressed in a Green Ninja costume teaches children about global warming.

[While promoting his book recently on CBS News](#), Coburn tried to distance himself from any responsibility for such “egregious spending” by asking rhetorically: “Where was the adult in the room when this was going on?” Interviewer Nancy Cordes then asked if any of his previous editions of “Wastebook” had made any impact or had reduced or eliminated any of the more outrageous examples of waste:

Cordes: Have you ever gotten any traction in Congress, where members say “We’re actually going to get rid of this?”



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Coburn: No. They don't pay attention to it. It's hard work to get rid of junk, it's hard work to do oversight, it's hard word to hold agencies accountable. And so what they would rather do is look good at home, get re-elected, and continue to spend money, and that's Republican and Democrat alike.

What Cordes failed to ask at that moment would have been the perfect follow-on question: "How does your effort, then, and your voting record, separate you from them? Doesn't this Wastebook of yours cost a lot of taxpayer money? Isn't this part of your attempt to look good at home while providing cover for your own votes for some of these projects? Isn't this part of your attempt to continue to get reelected?"

Unfortunately there is no record of Cordes asking, or of Coburn's response. But in July 2007 when Coburn criticized pork-barrel spending by Nebraska Senator Ben Nelson that would benefit Nelson's son's employer with millions of dollars of taxpayer money, newspapers in both Nebraska and Oklahoma noted that Coburn himself failed to criticize similar earmarks that he voted for that benefited his own state of Oklahoma.

Additionally, in May 2012, Coburn voted for H.R. 2072 to reauthorize the Export-Import Bank with increased lending limits backed by taxpayer monies from \$100 billion to \$140 billion. [As The New American has noted](#), the federal government has no constitutional authority to risk taxpayers' money "to provide loans the private sector considers too risky to provide.... Indeed, U.S. government-backed export financing is a form of corporate welfare, and if the Ex-Im Bank goes bust (as happened to Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae), the taxpayers will get stuck holding the bag."

Although Senator Coburn [typically scores fairly high](#) in *The New American's* Freedom Index, he does sometimes vote for unconstitutional spending. So Coburn's report illustrates the success of the big government to which he himself is an occasional contributor.

Photo of Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) presenting his 2013 Wastebook: AP Images

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