

United States Senate

October 3, 2025

Honorable Russell Vought
Director
Office of Management and Budget
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Vought,

As Chair and founder of the Senate DOGE Caucus, I think you'll agree it's critical Washington become more transparent, accountable, and efficient. Eliminating wasteful federal spending remains my top priority.

While Senator Schumer, House Minority Leader Jeffries and Congressional Democrats have decided shutting down the federal government over pipe-dream political priorities is productive, in practice, they are providing the Trump administration an amazing opportunity to save taxpayers from footing a \$400 million daily bill¹ by eliminating "non-essential" federal workers, trimming wasteful federal programs, and taking critical steps in curtailing Washington's out-of-control spending that put our nation \$37 trillion in debt.²

There's no better symbol of Washington's wasteful spending than paying non-essential bureaucrats \$400 million a day *not* to work. As of today, the bill to provide "do nothing pay" for federal employees furloughed by Schumer's shutdown is \$1.2 billion.

As you examine our federal spending and programs during this shutdown, here are more than a trillion dollars worth of ideas ripe for a trim:

¹ Office of Management and Budget. *Technical Supplement to the 2026 Budget: Balances of Budget Authority*. The White House, 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/BUDGET-2026-BBA.pdf>.

² U.S. Department of the Treasury. "Understanding the National Debt." *America's Finance Guide*, FiscalData.Treasury.gov, <https://fiscaldata.treasury.gov/americas-finance-guide/national-debt/>. Accessed 2 Oct. 2025.

Remaining COVID Funds

In March, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported approximately \$23.6 billion in unexpired, unobligated COVID-19 funding.³ In addition, GAO reported that another \$42 billion has expired and is no longer eligible for obligation. The American people moved beyond the COVID-19 pandemic years ago, and it is time that the federal government does the same. All outstanding COVID-19 funds should be rescinded immediately.

Trillion-Dollar Secret Slush Funds

Most of us feel lucky when we find a surprise \$20 bill in our pocket or some change in the couch cushions. Well, Washington is estimated to have ended this fiscal year with *trillions of dollars left unspent*, nearly \$1.6 trillion of which was not obligated for any specific purpose.⁴ With trillions of dollars stashed away in secret slush funds, why is Washington borrowing another dime? These accounts should be thoroughly scrubbed, with unnecessary funds canceled.

Vacant Buildings

Maintaining and leasing government office buildings costs \$8 billion every year.⁵ Yet, even after the President's return-to-work order, not a single headquarters of a major government agency or department in the nation's capital has met the Use It Act's 60 percent occupancy goal.⁶ Consolidating office space reduces operating and deferred maintenance costs. Better yet, auctioning off underutilized properties brings in revenue. I encourage you and President Trump to use all authorities available to you for disposal and consolidation of underutilized and unoccupied federal properties.

Nonessential Federal Employees

Leading up to the Schumer Shutdown, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) revealed to me that around 750,000 federal employees will be deemed non-essential and furloughed, and their compensation for *not working* incurs roughly \$400 million a day.⁷ Iowa's small businesses and farmers don't have the luxury of hiring non-essential employees, and neither should the government. OMB should work with the Office of Personnel Management and all other federal

³ "Government Efficiency and Effectiveness: Actions Needed to Address Management Weaknesses at Multiple Agencies," Government Accountability Office, GAO-25-107588, Sept. 2025, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-107588.pdf>.

⁴ Office of Management and Budget. *Technical Supplement to the 2026 Budget: Balances of Budget Authority*. The White House, 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/BUDGET-2026-BBA.pdf>.

⁵ Office of Management and Budget. *Report to Congress on Telework and Real Property*. The White House, August 2024, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/OMB-Report-to-Congress-on-Telework-and-Real-Property.pdf>.

⁶ Email from GSA Staff to Senator Ernst staff (June 5, 2025) (on file with Sen. Ernst's Office).

⁷ Congressional Budget Office. (2025, September). *Government Shutdown* (CBO Report No. 61773). Retrieved from <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2025-09/61773-Government-Shutdown.pdf>.

agencies to right-size the federal workforce, to prevent taxpayers from subsidizing so-called “non-essential” work.

Electric Vehicle Charging Station Boondoggle

In 2021, the Biden administration allocated \$7.5 billion for a nationwide network of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations, only to build 60 charging stations across the United States in the three years since enactment. Secretary of Transportation Duffy rightfully froze the program’s funding,⁸ however funds have since been unfrozen.⁹ This wasteful green new deal program should be ended, and the funding rescinded.

Cutting Up Retired Bureaucrats’ Credit Cards

DOGE and my Senate DOGE Caucus leadership uncovered a disturbing trend of federal employees leaving their job, without having their charge cards and accounts tied to official duties properly deactivated and closed.¹⁰ Last year the federal government held approximately 4.6 million active purchase cards and accounts with over \$40 billion in spending on them.¹¹ Over 11,000 transactions on these cards and accounts went to “known high-risk merchants” including casinos, night clubs, and bars.¹² Deactivating these accounts and declining these absurd payments is long overdue. We must ensure when federal employees stop working, associated government-issued credit cards do, too.

Golden State Gravy Trains Taking Taxpayers for a Ride

I commend the administration and Secretary Duffy for saving taxpayers \$4 billion by canceling funding for California’s \$100 billion-over budget and decades-behind schedule high speed rail project without a single rail being laid. But there are more gravy train projects that account for \$14 billion in spending that need to be derailed. Consider these absurd boondoggle price tags:¹³

⁸ Federal Highway Administration. *Suspending Approval of State Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Deployment Plans*. 6 Feb. 2025. U.S. Department of Transportation, <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/nevi/resources/state-plan-approval-suspension.pdf>.

⁹ U.S. Department of Transportation. "President Trump’s Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy Unveils Revised NEVI Guidance to Allow States to Actually Build EV Chargers." *U.S. Department of Transportation*, 11 Aug. 2025, <https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/president-trumps-transportation-secretary-sean-p-duffy-unveils-revised-nevi-guidance>.

¹⁰ Ernst, Joni. "Ernst Declines Bureaucrat Credit Cards." *U.S. Senate*, 12 Sept. 2025, <https://www.ernst.senate.gov/news/press-releases/ernst-declines-bureaucrat-credit-cards>. Accessed 2 Oct. 2025.

¹¹ Ernst, Joni K., and James Comer. "Request for Comprehensive Review of Federal Charge Card Programs." *U.S. Senate*, 16 May 2025, https://www.ernst.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/ernst-comer_gao_purchase_card_request.pdf. Accessed 2 Oct. 2025.

¹² U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Inspector General. (2025, February 4). *DODIG-2025-060*. Retrieved from https://media.defense.gov/2025/Feb/04/2003637187/-1/-1/1/DODIG-2025-060_SECURE.PDF.

¹³ Ernst, Joni. *Sec. Duffy Boondoggle Report*. U.S. Senate, 5 Aug. 2025, https://www.ernst.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/sec_duffy_boondoggle_report.pdf. Accessed 2 Oct. 2025.

- Honolulu Rail Transit, Hawaii - \$1,941,400,000
- Purple Line Transit, Maryland - \$1,006,000,000
- Transbay Corridor Core Capacity, California - \$1,335,730,000
- Subway extension to Silicon Valley, California - \$5,098,242,571
- San Francisco Transit Center, California - \$3,380,000,000
- Minneapolis Light Rail, Minnesota - \$938,690,000

Going a billion dollars over budget isn't a rounding error, it's a train wreck, and OMB should work with the Department of Transportation to rescind all federal funding for these projects.

U.S. Postal Service Electric Vehicles

The 2022 dubious Inflation Reduction Act directed \$3 billion for the United States Postal Service (USPS) to purchase electric delivery vehicles. However, much like the Biden administration's failed electric vehicle charging station endeavor, only 200 of the electric Next Generation Delivery Vehicles made it on the road in three years. The CBO estimates that today as much as \$1.3 billion of this funding remains available.¹⁴ All orders need to be cancelled, and any remaining funds need to be rescinded and marked "return to sender."

Bogus Bonuses

Federal employees and government contractors are being rewarded with financial bonuses despite poor performance resulting in delays and cost overruns.¹⁵ OMB should work with all relevant federal agencies to immediately cancel all bonuses for federal employees that are not contractually obligated.

Silly Science

The National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation (NSF), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) have all devoted valuable taxpayer funding towards silly science projects in recent decades. They asked and answered essential questions

¹⁴ Email from CBO Staff to Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee Staff (April 23, 2025) (on file with Sen. Ernst's Office).

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia. (2013, December 18). *Former EPA Senior Policy Advisor Sentenced to 32 Months in Prison for Carrying Out Scheme That Cost Government Nearly \$900,000—Admitted Collecting Pay for Hundreds of Days He Wasn't Working* [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/pr/former-epa-senior-policy-advisor-sentenced-32-months-prison-carrying-out-scheme-cost-0>.

ranging from “how fast can a shrimp run on a treadmill”¹⁶ to “does this sour cream and onion flavored potato chip look like Elvis?”¹⁷

The question is, what are we learning from the billions of taxpayer dollars Washington is spending on research and development of questionable projects that have little to no real scientific value? OMB should require NIH, NSF, and NASA to put forward justifications for all existing projects, and cancel those that do not benefit American interests.

Government Swag

Federal agencies collectively spend \$1.5 billion every year on public relations and propaganda.¹⁸ This includes koozies, key chains, coloring books, graphic novels, and costumed mascots. Let’s bag the swag. I’ve compiled an entire list of government mascots most people have never even heard of, like Franklin the Fair Market Fox and Sanctuary Sam.¹⁹ I wonder how many government mascots are considered essential employees and how many are being paid not to work?



Are these government mascots essential employees?

¹⁶ Goudarzi, Sara. "Scientists Put Shrimp on a Treadmill." *Live Science*, 13 July 2022, <https://www.livescience.com/4221-scientists-put-shrimp-treadmill.html>.

¹⁷ Voss, Joel L., Kara D. Federmeier, and Ken A. Paller. "The Potato Chip Really Does Look Like Elvis! Neural Hallmarks of Conceptual Processing Associated with Finding Novel Shapes Subjectively Meaningful." *Cerebral Cortex*, vol. 22, no. 10, 2012, pp. 2354–2364. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cercor/bhr315>.

¹⁸ U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2024, June 27). *Federal Advertising: Fourteen Percent of Contract Obligations in the Past Decade Went to Small Disadvantaged Businesses and Those Owned by Women and Minorities* (GAO Report No. GAO-24-107021). Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-107021>.

¹⁹ “2025 SWAG EXAMPLES: FEDERAL AGENCY MASCOTS& COLORING BOOKS,” U.S. Senator Joni Ernst website, January 2025. https://www.ernst.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/swag_act_examples_jan_2025.pdf.

Every Cloud Has a Silver Lining

Consolidating agencies' cloud computing software licenses could save \$750 million every year.²⁰

China's Mad Scientists

Dr. Fauci funneled taxpayers' dollars to risky Coronavirus research at China's Wuhan Institute of Virology. My investigations discovered millions more sent to other institutions and labs in the communist country for secretive risky research.²¹ Cutting off funding to the labs of our foreign adversaries is a no brainer.

United Nations Overpayments

The United Nations (U.N.) charges the U.S. higher membership dues than any other country and then Washington voluntarily contributes \$15 billion in additional contributions. U.N. staff helped plan and execute Hamas' terrorist attack on Israel in which American citizens were murdered and taken hostage. A 2024 U.N. plan promoted cash handouts for "migrants" to cover travel expenses and included a map with a red line leading right to the U.S. border. Our tax dollars to the U.N. are subsidizing threats to our own national security!

Defenseless Spending

It's time to declare war on waste at the Department of War (DoW). The Pentagon has never passed an audit and is unable to fully account for its budget. DoW wastes \$125 billion²² on bloated bureaucracy and inefficiency. DoW could save \$527 million²³ by streamlining the duplication and unnecessary overlap within its storage and distribution centers. DoW overpayments are legendary, and the department is still overpaying nearly \$1 million for spare

²⁰ Garland, Michael. *The Pernicious Consequences of Vendor Lock*. NetChoice, 2023, https://netchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/NetChoice_Garland_The-Pernicious-Consequences-of-Vendor-Lock.pdf.

²¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General. (2023, January). *The National Institutes of Health and EcoHealth Alliance Did Not Effectively Monitor Awards and Subawards, Resulting in Missed Opportunities to Oversee Research and Other Deficiencies* (Report No. A-05-21-00025). Retrieved from <https://oig.hhs.gov/oas/reports/region5/52100025.pdf>.

²² Defense Business Board. *Transforming the Department of Defense's Core Business Processes for Revolutionary Change*. Report No. FY15-01, 2015, <https://dbb.defense.gov/Portals/35/Documents/Reports/2015/DBB%20FY15-01%20Core%20Business%20Processes.pdf>. Accessed 2 Oct. 2025.

²³ Defense Business Board. *Transforming the Department of Defense's Core Business Processes for Revolutionary Change*. Report No. FY15-01, 2015, <https://dbb.defense.gov/Portals/35/Documents/Reports/2015/DBB%20FY15-01%20Core%20Business%20Processes.pdf>. Accessed 2 Oct. 2025.

parts.²⁴ This includes a nearly 8,000 percent off-the-shelf mark-up for a soap dispenser and \$1,220 for a coffee cup.²⁵

Paid to Do Nothing

While millions of Americans are working two or more jobs to make ends meet, some federal employees aren't working at all. Dozens of Department of Energy employees with nothing to do, spend the workday napping or playing chess, dominoes, and cards.²⁶ Hundreds of other federal employees spend years with no work assignments while on paid administrative leave, costing more than \$31 million in salary payments a year.²⁷ Congress passed a law to fix this problem years ago, but implementation is lacking. Put federal employees to work or send them home for good!

Stop Giving Away the Farm

Your call for budget cutting crusaders asks for individuals willing to work 80+ hours a week. Those types of hours aren't unusual for our nation's farmers and ranchers. Yet, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has been in the business of subsidizing cricket farms or teaching pigs to play video games, rather than supporting the hard-working Americans who feed the world.²⁸

Require Commonsense Project Management Principles

For every \$1 billion Washington spends, \$102 million is wasted as projects go over budget, are delayed, or fail to deliver. Implementing the most basic management systems could have saved taxpayers \$688.5 billion from the \$6.75 trillion the federal government spent this past year.²⁹ The fix is straightforward: require every project to have clear objectives and measurable benchmarks, just as any responsible business would.

²⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Inspector General. (2024, October 29). *Press Release: Audit of C-17 Spare Parts Pricing (Report No. DODIG-2025-009)*. Retrieved from <https://www.dodig.mil/In-the-Spotlight/Article/3948604/press-release-audit-of-c-17-spare-parts-pricing-report-no-dodig-2025-009/>.

²⁵ U.S. Air Force. (2018, July 2). *Travis developing new hot cup handle design, could save Air Force thousands* [News feature]. Travis Air Force Base. Retrieved from <https://www.travis.af.mil/News/Features/Display/Article/1566000/travis-developing-new-hot-cup-handle-design-could-save-air-force-thousands/>.

²⁶ Guzmán, Alicia Inez. "Workers Are Getting Paid to Do Nothing at Los Alamos National Laboratory." *The Nation*, 9 Nov. 2023, <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/los-alamos-laboratory-waste-fraud/>.

²⁷ U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2014, October 17). *Federal Paid Administrative Leave: Additional Guidance Needed to Improve OPM Data* (GAO Report No. GAO-15-79). Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/assets/d1579.pdf>.

²⁸ USAspending.gov. (n.d.). *Award: ASST_NON_20237003139142_12H3* [Data page]. Retrieved from https://www.usaspending.gov/award/ASST_NON_20237003139142_12H3.

²⁹ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Bureau of the Fiscal Service. (n.d.). *Federal spending*. America's Finance Guide. Retrieved October 2, 2025, from <https://fiscaldata.treasury.gov/americas-finance-guide/federal-spending/>.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, and I will be providing many more recommendations soon. My team and I stand ready to help you make some prime cuts during this Schumer Shutdown.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator