

March 20, 2025

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

Dear Director Vought,

Congratulations on your confirmation as Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

As the chair and founder of the Senate DOGE caucus, I look forward to working with you to make Washington more transparent, accountable, and efficient. It's impossible to achieve these goals if we don't even know how our tax dollars are being spent. During my time in the Senate, I authored a number of *laws* intended to do just that, *none* of which have been implemented. Apparently, unelected bureaucrats have granted themselves a veto over any laws they don't like.

On behalf of taxpayers, I am asking OMB to compel agencies to fully comply with these laws immediately, using every legally available means.

### Boondoggle Bills

When Congress earmarked funding for the construction of a \$400 million bridge—a bridge that would have been as long as the Golden Gate Bridge and higher than the Brooklyn Bridge—to a remote Alaskan island with just 50 residents, taxpayers across the country were outraged and it was never built.<sup>1</sup> This Bridge to Nowhere became *the* symbol of Washington waste.

Yet, at this very moment, numerous other projects that are going nowhere are costing taxpayers *ten times more* than that bridge. The most infamous one being California's high-speed rail project that is nearly \$100 billion over budget and more than a decade behind schedule.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Dinan, "Alaska kills 'bridge to nowhere' that helped put end to earmarks," The Washington Times, November 8, 2015; <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/nov/8/alaska-kills-bridge-to-nowhere-that-helped-put-end/>.

<sup>2</sup> Colleen Shalby, "Despite some progress, state's high-speed rail is \$100 billion short and many years from reality," Los Angeles Times, March 21, 2024; <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-03-21/high-speed-rail>.

Ground was broken on the project ten years ago<sup>3</sup> and construction is costing about \$1.8 million a day,<sup>4</sup> yet no tracks have even been laid.<sup>5</sup>



*A decade after the groundbreaking of California's high-speed rail, the state recently celebrated the completion of this bridge with no rails that connects to nothing in the middle of nowhere.<sup>6</sup>*

This isn't the only gravy train taking taxpayers for a ride. That is why I included a provision in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Section 11319 of Public Law 117-58) requiring the Department of Transportation (DOT) to annually disclose all projects that are \$1 billion or more over budget or five years or more behind schedule.<sup>7</sup>

To no one's surprise, the report itself is behind schedule. The first installment was due in November 2022.

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<sup>3</sup> Ralph Vartabedian, "Ground broken on controversial California bullet train project," Los Angeles Times, January 6, 2015; <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-california-bullet-train-groundbreaking-20150106-story.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Vartabedian, "How California's Bullet Train Went Off the Rails," New York Times, October 9, 2022; <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/09/us/california-high-speed-rail-politics.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Theo Burman, "California High-Speed Rail to 'Finally' Begin Laying Track," Newsweek, January 7, 2025; [https://www.newsweek.com/california-high-speed-rail-construction-update-newsom-track-down-2010759#:~:text=step%20towards%20completion,-.What%20to%20Know,%22early%20commitments%20on%20trainsets.%22&text=California%20has%20spent%20over%20\\$5.adding%20to%20costs%20and%20planning](https://www.newsweek.com/california-high-speed-rail-construction-update-newsom-track-down-2010759#:~:text=step%20towards%20completion,-.What%20to%20Know,%22early%20commitments%20on%20trainsets.%22&text=California%20has%20spent%20over%20$5.adding%20to%20costs%20and%20planning).

<sup>6</sup> CA High-Speed Rail X account, @CaHSRA, May 1, 2024; <https://x.com/CaHSRA/status/1785798979222925439>.

<sup>7</sup> Division A, Title I, Subtitle C, Section 11319 of Public Law 117-58, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, signed into law November 15, 2021; <https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ58/PLAW-117-publ58.pdf>.

Despite repeated requests from my office, not a single report has been issued to date. Since I am keeping my own running list,<sup>8</sup> I can assure you there are plenty of boondoggles being funded by DOT that deserve to be called out in this report.

I inserted a similar provision into the Water Resources Development Act of 2022 (part of Public Law 117-263), directing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to provide the Government Accountability Office (GAO) a list of all ongoing water resources development projects to determine how many are \$50 million or more over budget or five years or more behind schedule.<sup>9</sup> The information was required to be provided within 90 days.

Years later, the Corps still has not turned over the information. As a result, the analysis of overdue projects is now itself years behind schedule. Earlier this year, Congress passed another law (Section 1244 of Public Law 118-272) directing the Corps to comply with the previous law.<sup>10</sup>

Going millions or billions of dollars over budget and falling five years or more behind schedule should never be accepted as standard business practices, much less subsidized with blank checks from taxpayers. Likewise, compliance with the law is not optional.

## **COST Act**

Every time an outlandish example of government waste makes headlines, the government agencies funding the nonsense and the mainstream media try to dismiss the claims.

Take the example of shrimp on a treadmill paid for by the National Science Foundation (NSF).<sup>11</sup> One of the researchers involved bragged, “as far as I know this is the first time that shrimp have been exercised on a treadmill, and it was amazing to see how well they performed,” noting “healthy shrimp ran and swam at treadmill speeds of up to 20 meters per minute [66 feet per

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<sup>8</sup> “All Aboard the Boondoggle Express! Government Gravy Trains Going Off the Rails,” Office of Senator Joni Ernst, February 2025; [https://www.ernst.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/february\\_2025\\_squeal\\_award\\_-\\_all\\_aboard\\_the\\_boondoggle\\_express.pdf](https://www.ernst.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/february_2025_squeal_award_-_all_aboard_the_boondoggle_express.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Division H, Subtitle B, Section 8236, paragraph (c) of Public Law 117-263, the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, signed into law December 23, 2022; <https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ263/PLAW-117publ263.pdf>.

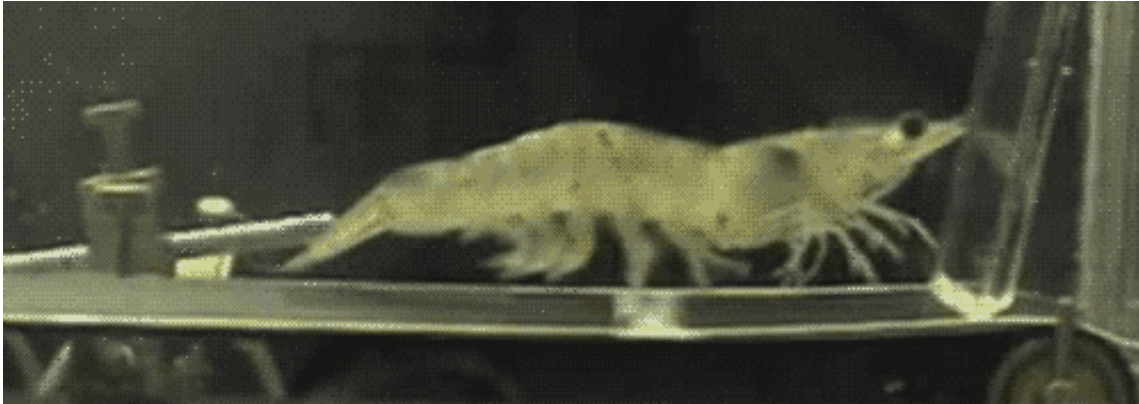
<sup>10</sup> Section 1244 of Public Law 118-272, the Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act of 2024, signed into law January 4, 2025; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/4367/text?overview=closed>.

<sup>11</sup> “RUI - Impaired Metabolism and Performance in Crustaceans Exposed to Bacteria,” U.S. National Science Foundation Award Abstract # 0725245, \$559,681 awarded between 2007 and 2009, NSF website, “Pacific white shrimp, *Litopenaeus vannamei*, and the Atlantic blue crab, *Callinectes sapidus*, will be injected with bacteria and monitored for changes in aerobic and anaerobic metabolism, and the expression of genes that regulate metabolism. Measurements will be made on animals that are resting, exercised or exposed to hypoxia,” accessed March 10, 2025; [https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD\\_ID=0725245&HistoricalAwards](https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=0725245&HistoricalAwards).

“RUI: Elevated environmental CO2 impairs acclimation to hypoxia in crustaceans,” U.S. National Science Foundation Award Abstract # 1147008, \$761,978 awarded between 2012 and 2018, “we will test how shrimp and crabs respond to low O2 and high CO2 when performing energetically demanding activities,” NSF website, accessed March 10, 2025; [https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD\\_ID=1147008](https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1147008).

minute] for hours.”<sup>12</sup> The lead research says one of the “fancier” treadmills used in the project cost about \$1,000.<sup>13</sup>

When the shrimp study was grilled for wasting taxpayer money, the liberal media, from NPR<sup>14</sup> to Reuters,<sup>15</sup> used the exact same word to dismiss the scrutiny: “misleading.”



*FACT: Taxpayer dollars were spent for this shrimp on a treadmill.*

Anyone can read the receipts for the research, which are listed on NSF’s own website,<sup>16</sup> and watch the video,<sup>17</sup> but taxpayers shouldn’t have to play a game of hide-and-seek to find out how their money is being spent.

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<sup>12</sup> Sara Goudarzi, “Scientists Put Shrimp on a Treadmill,” Live Science, October 18, 2006, updated July 13, 2022; <https://www.livescience.com/4221-scientists-put-shrimp-treadmill.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Nell Greenfieldboyce, “‘Shrimp On A Treadmill’: The Politics Of ‘Silly’ Studies,” NPR, August 23, 2011; <https://www.npr.org/2011/08/23/139852035/shrimp-on-a-treadmill-the-politics-of-silly-studies>.

<sup>14</sup> Nell Greenfieldboyce, “‘Shrimp On A Treadmill’: The Politics Of ‘Silly’ Studies,” NPR, August 23, 2011; <https://www.npr.org/2011/08/23/139852035/shrimp-on-a-treadmill-the-politics-of-silly-studies>.

<sup>15</sup> “Fact Check: ‘Shrimp on a treadmill’ study and cost misrepresented,” Reuters, February 21, 2025; <https://www.reuters.com/fact-check/shrimp-treadmill-study-cost-misrepresented-2025-02-21/#:~:text=Fact%20Check%3A%20'Shrimp%20on%20a%20treadmill'%20study%20and%20cost%20misrepresent ed,-By%20Reuters%20Fact&text=Biologists%20exploring%20how%20economically%20and,million%20as%20posts%20online%20suggest>.

<sup>16</sup> “RUI - Impaired Metabolism and Performance in Crustaceans Exposed to Bacteria,” U.S. National Science Foundation Award Abstract # 0725245, \$559,681 awarded between 2007 and 2009, NSF website, “Pacific white shrimp, *Litopenaeus vannamei*, and the Atlantic blue crab, *Callinectes sapidus*, will be injected with bacteria and monitored for changes in aerobic and anaerobic metabolism, and the expression of genes that regulate metabolism. Measurements will be made on animals that are resting, exercised or exposed to hypoxia,” accessed March 10, 2025; [https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD\\_ID=0725245&HistoricalAwards](https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=0725245&HistoricalAwards).

“RUI: Elevated environmental CO<sub>2</sub> impairs acclimation to hypoxia in crustaceans,” U.S. National Science Foundation Award Abstract # 1147008, \$761,978 awarded between 2012 and 2018, “we will test how shrimp and crabs respond to low O<sub>2</sub> and high CO<sub>2</sub> when performing energetically demanding activities,” NSF website, accessed March 10, 2025; [https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD\\_ID=1147008](https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1147008).

<sup>17</sup> “Shrimp on a Treadmill #forscience,” LiveScience, July 13, 2022; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrhRNMgOLYo>.



That is why every year for the past three decades, Congress renewed a provision requiring any project supported with funding provided by the Labor/Health and Human Services (HHS)/Education Appropriations Act to publicly disclose the cost to taxpayers.<sup>18</sup> At my urging, this requirement now also applies to taxpayer money provided by departments and agencies funded by the Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Act, including the Department of Treasury, Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and Small Business Administration (SBA).<sup>19</sup>

I have been reviewing documents for years and not a single agency or department appears to be abiding by the law. At my request, GAO conducted an independent review and concluded little, if anything, is being done to ensure compliance with the law.<sup>20</sup>

I authored a similar provision for research and development projects supported by the Department of Defense (DOD) that became law in 2021 as part of the National Defense Authorization Act (Public Law 116-283).<sup>21</sup>

Four years later, the law still isn't enforced. The Senate Appropriations Committee report accompanying the DOD division of the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2024 (Public Law 118-47) directed the Secretary of Defense to provide a plan for ensuring compliance within 60 days.<sup>22</sup> This too has not happened.

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<sup>18</sup> The longstanding text reads:

When issuing statements, press releases, requests for proposals, bid solicitations and other documents describing projects or programs funded in whole or in part with Federal money, all grantees receiving Federal funds included in this Act, including but not limited to State and local governments and recipients of Federal research grants, shall clearly state—

- (1) the percentage of the total costs of the program or project which will be financed with Federal money;
- (2) the dollar amount of Federal funds for the project or program; and
- (3) percentage and dollar amount of the total costs of the project or program that will be financed by non-governmental sources

The provision contained in the latest appropriations bill is Division D, Title V, Section 505 of Public Law 118-47, Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, signed into law March 23, 2024; <https://www.congress.gov/118/plaws/publ47/PLAW-118publ47.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> The provision contained in the latest appropriations bill is Division B, Title VI, Section 632 of Public Law 118-47, Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, signed into law March 23, 2024; <https://www.congress.gov/118/plaws/publ47/PLAW-118publ47.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> “GRANTS MANAGEMENT: Agency Action Required to Ensure Grantees Identify Federal Contribution Amounts,” Government Accountability Office, March 2019; <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-282.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Subtitle A, Title II, Section 212 of Public Law 116-283, the William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, became law January 1, 2021; <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ283/PLAW-116publ283.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Disclosure requirements for recipients of research and development funds .— The Committee urges the full disclosure of Federal support and transparency by recipients of Department of Defense research and development grants and understands Title 10, United States Code, Section 4207, now explicitly provides effective disclosure requirements for these purposes. Therefore, the Committee directs the Secretary of Defense, not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this act to provide a report to the congressional defense committees detailing plans for ensuring compliance with Title 10, United States Code, Section 4207, including enforcement actions, related to disclosure of Federal funds.

Page 188 of Senate Report 118-81 accompanying S. 2587, Department of Defense Appropriations Bill, 2024, July 27, 2023; [www.congress.gov/118/crpt/srpt81/CRPT-118srpt81.pdf](https://www.congress.gov/118/crpt/srpt81/CRPT-118srpt81.pdf).

It's understandable why bureaucrats at the Pentagon don't want to disclose costs when they are paying \$1,220 just for a coffee cup,<sup>23</sup> but it's the law and must be enforced.

Failure to enact these legal requirements isn't without consequences. The lack of transparency is impairing the ability of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) to identify wasteful spending and complicating congressional oversight. It also allows biased media to spread disinformation, which can only be countered with the facts, currently being hidden or suppressed by government agencies and bureaucrats.

**Every department and agency covered by these laws must begin complying and OMB should issue guidance for other departments and agencies to follow the same rules.**

Putting a public price tag on all taxpayer-funded projects eliminates confusion by making it clear which agency sponsored a project along with its cost.

### **Secret Spending**

While Americans were struggling to make ends meet with the rising costs of groceries, Biden's State Department spent \$24,000 supporting a bakery roadshow in China.<sup>24</sup>

As the war between Russia and Ukraine dragged on, the Biden administration spent another \$121,000 on a breathalyzer for the U.S. embassy in Ukraine.<sup>25</sup>

Our tax dollars were being scattered all over the world, from \$124,000 for an instant car wash system in Pakistan<sup>26</sup> to \$35,000 for a traveling circus in California.<sup>27</sup>

My office found these by doing a quick word search on USAspending.gov.

All "federal financial assistance and expenditures that include grants, subgrants, loans, awards, cooperative agreements, and other forms of financial assistance" as well as "contracts,

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<sup>23</sup> Tech. Sgt. James Hodgman, "Travis developing new hot cup handle design, could save Air Force thousands," Travis Air Force Base, July 2, 2018; <http://www.travis.af.mil/News/Features/Display/Article/1566000/travis-developing-new-hot-cup-handle-design-could-save-air-force-thousands/>.

<sup>24</sup> \$23,816 from the Department of State for "promotion bakery ingredients roadshow," in China, USAspending.gov, accessed March 11, 2025; [https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT\\_AWD\\_19CH5823P7314\\_1900\\_-NONE\\_-NONE-](https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT_AWD_19CH5823P7314_1900_-NONE_-NONE-).

<sup>25</sup> \$121,000 from the Department of State for "acquisition of breathalyzer on behalf of U.S. embassy, Kyiv, Ukraine," USAspending.gov, accessed March 11, 2025; [https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT\\_AWD\\_19GE5023P0006\\_1900\\_-NONE\\_-NONE-](https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT_AWD_19GE5023P0006_1900_-NONE_-NONE-).

<sup>26</sup> \$123,767 from the Department of State for an "instant car wash (ICW) system "in Pakistan, USAspending.gov, accessed March 11, 2025; [https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT\\_AWD\\_19PK3323P2151\\_1900\\_-NONE\\_-NONE-](https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT_AWD_19PK3323P2151_1900_-NONE_-NONE-).

<sup>27</sup> \$35,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts "to support the creation and touring of free circus arts performances to outdoor sites," USAspending.gov, accessed March 11, 2025; [https://www.usaspending.gov/award/ASST\\_NON\\_1910783-54-23\\_5920](https://www.usaspending.gov/award/ASST_NON_1910783-54-23_5920).

subcontracts, purchase orders, task orders, and delivery orders”<sup>28</sup> are required by law (Public Law 109-282) to be publicly disclosed in the searchable website.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, a GAO review found almost one-third of agencies are not reporting their spending to USAspending.gov.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, billions of dollars of federal expenditures, referred to as “other transaction agreements,” or OTAs, are also not being included on USAspending.gov because some bureaucrats decided “OTAs do not fall within the express FFATA definition of ‘federal award.’”<sup>31</sup>

Regardless of bureaucratic word games, an OTA is undeniably an “expenditure.” Just last year, agencies spent over \$18.2 billion on OTAs, according to data analyzed by my office,<sup>32</sup> and none of these transactions appear to be listed in USAspending.gov.

Secret spending schemes in which tax dollars were being steered to sketchy organizations by government agencies, including the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), compelled Congress to establish USAspending.gov twenty years ago.<sup>33</sup>

Despite this requirement to publicly disclose where the money is going, USAID continued withholding spending information from both the public and Congress.

A Trump administration official recently indicated fraud being uncovered by DOGE at USAID could be referred to the Department of Justice for potential criminal action. “The conduct in question arose because of USAID’s decentralized accountability system that often left grantees on the ground using American tax dollars in ways that were both inappropriate and potentially illegal.”<sup>34</sup>

This is exactly what USAspending.gov was designed to prevent by making financial transactions transparent and accountable. Sunlight is the best disinfectant, and it’s the law.

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<sup>28</sup> Text of the Public Law 109-282, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006; <https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/109/282.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Public Law 109-282, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, signed into law September 26, 2006; <https://www.congress.gov/109/plaws/publ282/PLAW-109publ282.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> “Federal Spending Transparency: Opportunities to Improve USAspending.gov Data,” Government Accountability Office, November 7, 2023; <https://www.gao.gov/assets/d24106214.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> “Federal Spending Transparency: Opportunities to Improve USAspending.gov Data,” Government Accountability Office, November 7, 2023; <https://www.gao.gov/assets/d24106214.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Federal Procurement Data System, accessed March 2025; [https://www.fpds.gov/ezsearch/fpdsportal?q=+AWARD\\_TYPE%3A%22Other+Transaction+Agreement%22&s=FP\\_DS.GOV&templateName=1.5.3&indexName=awardfull&x=0&y=0&sortBy=SIGNED\\_DATE&desc=Y](https://www.fpds.gov/ezsearch/fpdsportal?q=+AWARD_TYPE%3A%22Other+Transaction+Agreement%22&s=FP_DS.GOV&templateName=1.5.3&indexName=awardfull&x=0&y=0&sortBy=SIGNED_DATE&desc=Y).

<sup>33</sup> Senator Tom Coburn, introductory statement on S. 2590, Congressional Record, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, April 6, 2006, Vol. 152, No. 43; <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/volume-152/issue-43/senate-section/article/S3237-1>.

<sup>34</sup> Jon Michael Raasch, “Trump considers criminal charges for USAID staff after DOGE uncovered wild ‘abuse,’” Daily Mail, March 5, 2025; <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14465547/Trump-considers-criminal-charges-USAID-staff-DOGE-uncovered-wild-abuse.html>.


## **Enforcing the Law**

I am proposing legislative fixes, but the real problem is agencies refuse to respect the law.

I appreciate your commitment at your confirmation hearing before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee to make agencies adhere to these laws. I am following up to learn when and what guidance will be issued to ensure compliance.

Please let me know if you have any questions or if I can be of any assistance with these efforts.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst  
United States Senator