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Too Much Waste in Washington

President Obama and Senate Democrats have been bewailing the effects of the \$85 billion sequestration. What they have not done is offer a serious alternative in the four months since the President declared sequestration “will not happen.” Instead of moving the goalposts, they need to follow (not misinterpret) the law of what sequestration is: to cut spending (not increase taxes).

For years, the President has paid lip service to cutting wasteful spending in Washington. But when it comes to actually slowing the growth of government, Democrats can’t find one program to do without. The reality is that Washington has a spending problem.

“I want to go line by line through every item in the federal budget and eliminate programs that don't work and make sure that those that do work, work better and cheaper.” – [Sen. Barack Obama](#), October 7, 2008

Under President Obama:

- Spending has increased from \$2.98 trillion in fiscal year 2008 to \$3.54 trillion in fiscal year 2012. As a percentage of GDP, spending has increased from 20.8 percent in 2008 to 22.8 percent in 2012.
- Debt has increased by nearly \$6 trillion in four years: from \$10.6 trillion when the President was first inaugurated to more than \$16.5 trillion today.
- Four deficits in a row of over a trillion dollars, and on track for a fifth year, where we never had a single-year deficit of more than \$500 billion in our history before.
- No meaningful mandatory spending reforms have taken place, despite the fact that mandatory spending will [increase](#) by 80 percent in the coming decade, compared to an 11 percent increase in discretionary spending.

If we don’t responsibly cut spending, Americans will continue to watch Washington waste their money and limit their personal freedom. The country simply cannot afford to continue wasting hard working taxpayers’ dollars.

Start by Cutting Waste

Making government more efficient and accountable should be a common goal, and could replace the sequester cuts. According to the federal government website Performance.gov, in 2011 the federal government [wasted](#) \$115.3 billion of taxpayers' money on improper payments. The bulk of this waste happened in just a few programs:

- Medicare fee-for-service (\$28.8 billion)
- Medicaid (\$21.9 billion)
- Earned Income Tax Credit (\$15.2 billion)
- Unemployment Insurance (\$13.7 billion)

Many government programs have good purposes that should be supported, but the sheer size of government has perpetrated an inefficient and unaccountable bureaucracy. The Government Accountability Office has [identified](#) 51 areas where programs were inefficient, ineffective, and overlapping, leading to billions of dollars in wasted taxpayer dollars, including:

- More than **80 economic development programs** operating out of four different cabinet agencies: the Departments of Agriculture; Commerce; Housing and Urban Development; and the Small Business Administration.
- There are **173 programs promoting science, technology, engineering, and math education** across 13 agencies.
- Twenty agencies oversee more than **50 financial literacy programs**.
- More than **50 programs on supporting entrepreneurs** across four departments.
- There are **47 job training programs** in nine agencies that cost \$18 billion in fiscal year 2009. Only five programs have had an impact study completed since 2004 to determine whether or not participants secured a job as a result of the program; and about half have not had a single performance review since 2004.
- GAO found at least **37 duplicative investments in information technology**, amounting to \$1.2 billion over five years.
- **14 programs to administer grants and loans to reduce diesel emissions** across three departments.

The Problem Is Everywhere

The Obama Administration has been issuing press releases from every agency claiming that sequester cuts would be devastating. But waste and misappropriation are rampant across every part of the federal bureaucracy. Cuts would amount to a reduction of less than 2.5 percent of the federal budget this year. Cutting across-the-board is not wise, but departments should still function with minimal disruption to Americans. A quick glance at recent agency expenditures proves this to be true.

- The Department of Defense has spent more than **\$67 billion** over the past 10 years in “non defense” spending. For example, the Pentagon spends \$9 billion on DOD-run

grocery stores, runs its own microbrewery, funded beef jerky development, operates 234 golf courses around the world, and spent \$1 million on interstellar space travel.

- The Department of Energy's Weatherization Program, which received **\$5 billion** in stimulus funds, exhibited a failure rate of 80 percent (12 out of every 15 homes fail inspection) due to substandard workmanship.
- The Federal Communications Commission spent **\$2.2 billion** last year to provide cell phones for low-income Americans.
- The federal government spent nearly **\$1.7 billion** to maintain 77,700 underused or unused buildings in 2010.
- The Internal Revenue Service stored 22,486 items of unused furniture in a warehouse at an annual cost of **\$862,000**.
- The Labor Department spent **\$495,000** in stimulus money on 100 television commercials to advertise the Obama Administration's Jobs Corps Initiative for green jobs.
- The National Institutes of Health spent **\$170,000** over three years to study the hookah smoking habits of Jordanian university students.
- In 2012, the EPA and the Department of Energy spent **\$213,000** on a summit in conjunction with the United Nations to "continue an international dialogue on harmonization of global standards for and promotion of advanced vehicles technologies."
- The Department of Veterans Affairs employs more than **500** public affairs officers.

The Obama Administration proposed the sequester, and now claims it cannot live with the effects. It has rejected Republican plans for more rational cuts that still bring down the deficit, but has offered no viable plan of its own. If the President is serious about how to cut spending, and make government more efficient and effective, he could start by cutting some of the money we all know Washington has been wasting.