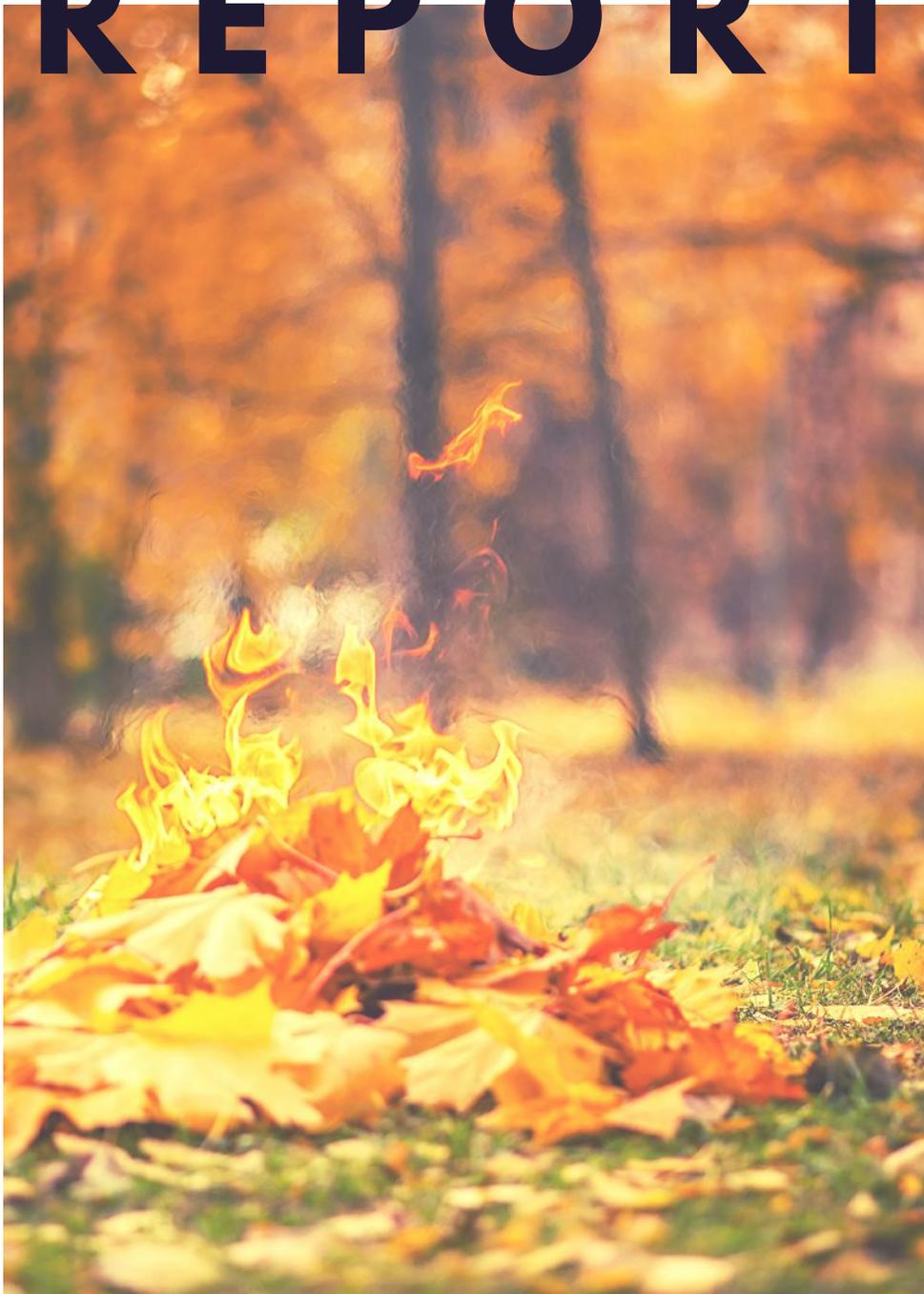


WASTE REPORT



WASTE REPORT | FALL 2019

BY CHAIRMAN RAND PAUL

The federal government wasted Americans' tax dollars as it...

- Spent millions on the Washington Metro Area Transit Authority (WMATA) \$153,000,000
- Funded debate and Model United Nations competitions in Afghanistan (State) \$300,000
- Funded research that involves hooking Zebrafish on nicotine (NIH) \$708,466
- Bought a statue from Bob Dylan for the embassy in Mozambique (State) \$84,375
- Studied the connection between drinking alcohol and winding up in the ER (NIH) \$4,658,865
- Improved the quality of Egyptian schooling (USAID) \$16,000,000
- Bought textbooks for Afghan students (USAID) \$33,921,175
- Brought Serbian cheese up to international standards (USAID) \$22,000,000

TAXPAYER DOLLARS WASTED: \$230,672,881

STAND CLEAR FOR WASTE

The federal government is expected to spend \$153,000,000.00 on the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority in FY2020

Ask nearly any Washingtonian of their opinion of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (Metro), and the answer will near universally be negative. In fact, Metro's routine service outages, delays, incomprehensible policy choices, and mismanagement of funds has led to, as WAMU reported earlier this year, **the lowest ridership in almost 20 years** — roughly 595,000 per weekday “in last half of 2018,” which is down from a peak of “almost 752,000” per weekday a little over 10 years ago.¹ **Despite its chronically bad performance, the Congressional Budget Office is projecting the federal government will cut Metro a \$153,000,000 check for Fiscal Year 2020.**²

Metro is “so bad,” a piece in the *Washington Examiner* stated in 2017, “that it derives a benefit from low expectations. Riders are let down so often that higher fares for worse service is what they have come to expect.”³

Yet, somehow Metro has self-reported generally positive feedback from customers.⁴ When a watchdog tried to get a copy of a Metro customer survey and properly filed a request for documents, **Metro refused to release it but eventually provided (and charged the watchdog \$324.17 for) a 29-page document, 28 pages of which were redacted.**⁵ In fact, according to the watchdog, Metro threatened to never honor future requests from the

watchdog, submitted via a particular email, if it didn't pay the \$324.17.⁶ **The watchdog had to sue to force them to release the redactions.**⁷

The case, for which the same Metro that a WAMU story called “cash-strapped”⁸ in 2017 has hired a high-powered D.C. law firm, is currently working its way through the court system and is projected to take more than half a year to resolve.⁹ Metro's obstinacy did not surprise the watchdog, who says that “various general managers have promised transparency but, in fact, Metro has become increasingly opaque. A taxpayer-funded organization withholding information ... from the public on dubious grounds is unacceptable.”¹⁰

Recently, rather than using its service to improve public perception, Metro launched a \$400,000 public relations campaign, aptly titled “Back2Good,” to entice commuters back.¹¹ If you are questioning the reasoning of spending so much money on a PR campaign, you are not alone. *The Washington Post* reported that “some were surprised at Metro's decision to spend six-figures on a PR campaign during a budget crisis, when the agency [was] considering raising fares and reducing service to offset a



Metro's Back2Good program appears to not have improved public sentiment. Photo Credit: Metro <https://twitter.com/wmata/status/809786446173401088>.

\$290 million shortfall. Wouldn't that money be better spent on repairs and infrastructure, they asked?"¹²

The *Post* also noted that "Back2Good isn't the first time in recent history Metro has forked over a pretty penny for public relations," pointing out that "[w]eeks after a smoke calamity took a woman's life at L'Enfant Plaza in January 2015, Metro hired two high-powered public relations firms to assist the agency with image control. The cost of those hires: \$250,000," adding, "In that case, the costs were covered by Metro's insurance carrier, AIG, according to an agency spokeswoman."¹³



An intrepid *Washingtonian* took the time to edit the grammar of a Metro ad at Metro's Navy Yard stop, an ad that plays on fears of climate change. Photo Credit: FSO Staff.

However, Metro's high-cost PR work apparently has not persuaded riders, and it did not persuade Maryland about Metro's competency, either. This summer, the state held back over \$55 million in funding, citing "an ongoing pattern of fiscal obfuscation and a lack of cooperation from WMATA," according to a letter the

Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) sent Metro.¹⁴ In the letter, MDOT stated, "WMATA's books cannot continue to be a financial black hole, absorbing every dollar it can but providing no information or data that Marylanders expect from public institutions."¹⁵

It appears the action had an effect. In September, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan decided to release the funds, saying to news outlets, "WMATA has finally agreed to our demands for greater transparency for every dollar spent and all future investments by the Metro system."¹⁶

So we've seen some of the overall issues, but let's take a little deeper look at some of the specific projects on which Metro is spending our tax dollars.

Subsidizing Competitors

One might think Metro would use its funding to improve its services. **Instead, it launched a \$1 million subsidy pilot program involving one of their competitors.**¹⁷ Metro SmarTrip pass holders will be eligible for \$3 per Lyft rides 40 times a month.¹⁸ According to Metro, the users must "commute to or from work within Metro's compact service area," have "[a] job that requires [them] to commute to and/or from work between midnight and 4am," and have the Lyft app.¹⁹

Metro does require details so it can verify the rider's employment, and that he or she works between midnight and 4am.²⁰ Program riders must also travel with others — a private bus.²¹

Now midnight to 4am is quite late, **but it should be noted that Metro offers a bus**



Metro says, 'Use Lyft!' 'Photo Credit: Metro, <https://www.wmata.com/service/bus/>.

service at that time, called its “After Midnight Service.”²² While Metro cited schedule changes in its rail service as the reason for the program,²³ the development was not exactly universally praised by those targeted.²⁴

It is simply sheer incompetence for a company to claim *subsidizing and showcasing a competitor* is a good use of its budget at any time, never mind when its users are at a 20-year low, and it is trying to instill confidence.

Operation Golden Potty

If there is any case of Metro’s mismanagement that perfectly encapsulates the problem, it is what the WMATA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) has deemed “Operation Golden Potty.”²⁵

From 2003 to 2017, according to the OIG, Metro spent “approximately \$500,000 maintaining a single self-cleaning toilet located at the Huntington Metro Station.”²⁶ The OIG cannot definitively state how much was spent because Metro lost invoices for 2007, 2012, 2013, and 2014.²⁷

To make matters worse, the toilet was not user-friendly, a documented experience shared by the news shows — though it did excel at providing some background music for users.²⁸

Metro justified their purchase to the OIG as necessary in the wake of the September 11,

2001 attacks.²⁹ According to Metro, the toilet was necessary to provide customers access to a bathroom at the Huntington Station because it would present “security concerns” for riders to use the station’s already existing bathrooms.³⁰ The OIG was skeptical this was the reason and refused to adopt that determination in its review.³¹ And it is hard to blame them. Allowing riders into the system carrying backpacks, suitcases, or anything else without being checked by security guards is not a security concern, but using the bathroom is?

To top it off, the half-million-dollar toilet sat broken and abandoned in the Huntington Station from 2017 to early 2019.³² Metro contracted with a private company to clean and maintain the self-cleaning toilet but canceled the contract in 2017.³³ While Metro had plans to move the toilet to a different station,³⁴ it ended up decommissioning and removing the facility in early 2019.³⁵ FSO staff inquired about the current whereabouts of the toilet, but Metro was unable to provide an answer.



Photo of the half-million-dollar toilet facility. Metro left the facility broken for two years before taking it out of the Metro station. Photo Credit: Wikipedia Commons / Ser_Amantio_di_Nicolao, via WAMU. <https://wamu.org/story/19/07/26/inspector-general-found-wmata-spent-416000-on-a-self-clean>.

“Temporarily” Out of Service...

Part of what irritates so many Washingtonians about Metro is its seeming inability to do the easy things. For just three of the many egregious examples, **Metro has spent more than 52 months building a bike storage room at Metro’s East Falls Church Metro Station,³⁶ took more than 48 months³⁷ fixing the air chilling system in two of its most trafficked Metro stations,³⁸ and took roughly 25 months to repair three escalators in another station.³⁹**

To be fair, it appears the bike storage rooms are more than just four walls, with *The Washington Post* reporting in a November 2015 article on multiple such projects that they would be “similar to the one in College Park,” which it said “featur[es] security cameras, an emergency callbox and real-time video and intercom communications with Metro’s Parking Operations Control Center.”⁴⁰ That same article also stated the facilities were “scheduled to be open next month, [Metro] said.”⁴¹ According to the OIG, which is looking into the situation, Metro has indicated the East Falls Church facility will not open until September 2020.⁴²

A delayed bike facility pales in comparison to the treatment train riders were subjected to over the past four years. In two major stations, **Metro repeatedly failed to fix the air chilling system, turning the stations into what Metro riders were calling “a ‘freaking furnace,’ ‘unbearable’ and ‘inhumane,’”** *The Washington Post* reported in August 2019.⁴³ The problem arose in 2015, yet Metro announced in August 2019 that the fix was again delayed.⁴⁴ Finally, later that month, Metro said the system was repaired.⁴⁵

And it’s not just bike buildings and air conditioning. Metro recently finished a project it slated to last **“approximately 2 ½ years”** to repair three escalators at its Friendship Heights station.⁴⁶ While Metro stated the escalators under repair would not be simultaneously out of service, it defies belief that replacing three escalators would take a contractor and team of workers more than 4,000 hours.⁴⁷

Clearly, WMATA is a poor steward of public funds, be they federal, state, or local. Why Americans from across the country are being forced to subsidize the Washington, D.C., public transit system’s ineptitude is beyond comprehension.

The federal government simply cannot afford to flush \$153 million down the toilet this coming year, particularly on an agency seemingly hell-bent on wasting Americans’ hard-earned tax dollars.

DEBATABLE PRIORITIES

U.S. Department of State is spending up to \$300,000.00 on debate and Model United Nations competitions in Afghanistan

After 18 years, thousands of American soldiers killed and wounded, and nearly \$1 trillion in military spending alone,⁴⁸ it is safe to say the United States is in a war of attrition in Afghanistan. What might break the deadlock and help secure a brighter future for Afghanistan? Well, if you’re the State Department, and you keep getting handed enormous amounts of taxpayer money from Congress without much scrutiny, you might think **spending up to \$300,000 on debate**

and Model United Nations competitions in Afghanistan could do the trick.⁴⁹

According to the grant notice, the State Department is paying “for two organizations to plan, organize, and implement local and national debate or Model United Nations training and tournaments for university students [aged 18-30] throughout Afghanistan. ...”⁵⁰ **The two grants, the sum of which will be up to \$300,000, will run concurrently for three years and are designed for up to 300-500 participants per year.**⁵¹

The State Department says the goal of the program is “[f]or Afghan youth to develop skills required for successful civic engagement (e.g., public speaking, critical thinking, leadership, team building, and in-depth research)” — with an eye on “contribut[ing] to the strengthening of civil society” in Afghanistan.⁵² If that’s your goal, you might want to make sure participants can understand the language the State Department requires them to use in the competitions: English.⁵³ **But the language requirement may be a tall order out the gate, as only six percent of the Afghan population can speak English.**⁵⁴

Thankfully, State at least requires grantees to produce “[a] plan for assessing English language skills of potential participants,”⁵⁵ ostensibly limiting the potential participants to those few age-appropriate Afghans who already know English. As part of the final program, the grantees will have to “[provide] pre-debate training workshops and research sessions to prepare participants to successfully serve on debate teams in formal debate competitions conducted in English,” as well as “[conduct] additional programs or activities

that enhance English and relate to debate competitions.”⁵⁶

This is what should no longer be up for debate: using Americans’ taxpayer dollars to put on debate and Model U.N. tournaments in Afghanistan is a waste of Americans’ money — particularly when the events are being held in a language 94 percent of Afghans don’t even speak!

HOOKED ON WASTE

The NIH is spending up to \$708,466 on research in London that involves hooking Zebrafish on nicotine

As debate rages in the country over vaping, **the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is sponsoring a nearly five-year project that involves actively addicting its subjects, Zebrafish, to nicotine.**⁵⁷ **The project, being conducted at the Queen Mary University of London, will cost the American taxpayer \$708,466.**⁵⁸

Researchers reported to NIH that they are using your money in part “to identify genes affecting vulnerability to addiction by screening lines of mutagenized zebrafish for core behaviors associated with addiction: sensitivity to drug reward and impulsivity.”⁵⁹

They state they will “test the hypothesis that genes that show persistent adaptive changes in expression following chronic nicotine exposure are also addiction vulnerability genes,” or, in other words, testing the relationship between addiction and genetics.⁶⁰

Spending fewer than a million dollars may seem like a “drop in the bucket” compared to the hundreds of millions and billions the federal government routinely dishes out, but it all adds up to the massive budget deficits and \$23 trillion national debt before us today.

Everybody agrees that nicotine addiction is a problem. But you have to be smoking something other than nicotine if you think the solution is to ship American tax dollars abroad to addict Zebrafish to nicotine.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT IT IS A-WASTIN' ... YOUR MONEY

***U.S. Department of State bought
an \$84,375.00 statue from Bob
Dylan for the embassy in
Mozambique***

With hits like “Mr. Tambourine Man,” “Blowin’ in the Wind,” and “Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door,” there can be no denying Bob Dylan is a musical icon. But do his musical accomplishments justify the State Department choosing to buy an original Bob Dylan sculpture, for \$84,375,⁶¹ to place in its embassy in Mozambique?⁶²

Apparently, the federal government’s answer is “Yes.”

Why is the State Department buying art in the first place? Every time State builds “any new project,” such as a consulate or embassy, **“0.5% of the value of the construction project” is allocated for art acquisition, according to the department, no matter how large that 0.5% represents.**⁶³ For embassies, the State Department often leans

on its “Art in Embassies” (AIE) program, “which,” a report noted, “places American art in U.S. diplomatic outposts worldwide to showcase U.S. culture and soft power.”⁶⁴ As part of its work, AIE has also received hundreds (at least) of donated pieces.⁶⁵

But with the basic purpose in mind, it’s important to point out that the same report cited above also mentions a former government official “critici[zing] the department for putting artwork on display inside the U.S. embassies,” as “nearly all ... are surrounded by security perimeters with limited public access.”⁶⁶

Great music is timeless, and Bob Dylan’s work will continue to endure.

What cannot endure, if we are ever to get our deficit and debt under control, is such extravagant spending by federal agencies.

NIH ASKS, “CAN DRINKING TOO MUCH GET YOU INJURED?” WE ASK, “WILL NIH STOP WASTING TAXPAYER DOLLARS?”

***NIH has spent \$4,658,865.00
studying the connection between
drinking alcohol and winding up
in the emergency room***

The federal government and the general population have long recognized that drinking alcohol increases the likelihood of injuries stemming from events like traffic accidents while under the influence. For example, in 1984, President Ronald Reagan signed the National Minimum Drinking Age Act into law,

withholding certain federal funds from states that did not raise their drinking age.⁶⁷ In addition, and in the absence of a federal mandate, the alcoholic beverage industry regularly urges consumers to “drink responsibly.”⁶⁸

But scientists at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) did not trust common knowledge and have decided **to spend \$4,658,865 over several years to study the connection between drinking alcohol, hurting yourself or somebody else, and winding up in the ER.**⁶⁹

Most recently, the researchers have pursued three goals. The first includes **looking at alcohol use in the six hours before an injury, as well as the type of injury that brought patients to the ER**, such as “traffic [accidents], falls ... near drowning,” etc., in consideration of several factors in different countries, including legal restrictions on alcohol.⁷⁰ Second, they are “**estimat[ing] relative risk (RR) of injury related to alcohol consumption volume (dose-response relationship) by cause of injury, (in layman’s terms, if you are more likely to get hurt, and how, if you drink more).**”⁷¹ Lastly, they are “**estimat[ing] alcohol attributable fraction (AAF) by cause of injury...**”⁷² (or in other words, **the degree to which alcohol is responsible for the injury).**

So, what findings has the research helped produce? In the abstract for a 2019 paper, researchers assert that “[c]ountries with high DDP [detrimental drinking pattern] are at higher risk of injury from most causes at a given level of consumption, while countries with low restrictiveness of alcohol policy are at higher risk of injury at lower levels of

consumption and at higher risk of traffic injuries at high levels of consumption.”⁷³

Who would have thought that when it’s easier to get your hands on alcohol, the injury risk can increase, especially when it comes to vehicle-related injuries?

We likely all know someone whose life has been tragically impacted by alcohol. But at a time when we have to borrow from China just to pay our bills, is there really a reason this research, especially when so much common sense is involved, at the very least could not have been conducted without the taxpayers’ resources?

HOW DO YOU WRITE “WASTE” IN HIEROGLYPHS?

USAID is spending up to \$16,000,000.00 to improve the quality of Egyptian schooling

Nearly everyone has fond memories of some of their excellent teachers. But, unfortunately, the state of the American education system is such that there are also not-so-great memories and experiences. Knowing the problems that exist here at home, it may surprise Americans to learn that their government is **investing up to \$16 million to improve the quality of the Egyptian educational system.**⁷⁴

The massive sum of money is meant to help Egypt’s Ministry of Education and Technical Education (MOETE) train school officials and install a better system for licensing and certifying them that is tied to merit.⁷⁵

USAID states that the “overall goal is to support improved teaching of the reformed curricula at the primary level by qualified, incentivized, and continuously developed teachers; and furthermore, to institutionalize a [Continuous Professional Development] system that adapts to Egyptian educators’ evolving professional development needs.”⁷⁶

Noble aims, sure, but before we go telling other countries how to improve their education system, perhaps we should take a closer look at the story here at home.

A Crisis in American Education

According to a 2018 report by TNTP (The New Teacher Project), for which it “partnered with five diverse school systems” in the U.S. to conduct direct observation and other research, **“Students spend most of their time in school without access to four key resources: grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and teachers who hold high expectations.”**⁷⁷ In fact, they state, “[s]tudents spent more than 500 hours per school year on assignments that weren’t appropriate for their grade and with instruction that didn’t ask enough of them — the equivalent of six months of wasted class time in each core subject.”⁷⁸

Meanwhile, according to The Hechinger Report, **“Since the ... National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP, was first administered in the early 1990s, student achievement, particularly in math, steadily improved until the late 2000s, then flatlined. Reading scores also stagnated. In 2015, scores dipped in math among both fourth- and eighth-graders, and these math**

scores did not bounce back with the 2017 test. Average students’ scores remain well below what test overseers consider to be ‘proficient’ for each grade level.”⁷⁹

In the report cited earlier, TNTP found that the students in the study **“demonstrated mastery of grade-level standards ... 17 percent of the time”** despite “[meeting] the demands of their assignments 71 percent of the time,” and spending “88 percent” of class time on class-related activities.⁸⁰ **However, the majority still received As and Bs.**⁸¹

Yet the clear room for improvement at home has not stopped the big spenders at USAID from gallivanting around the world and trying to fix Egypt’s flailing system.⁸²

When it comes to wisely using your hard-earned money, the federal government simply isn’t passing the test.

TEXTBOOK GOVERNMENT WASTE

USAID has spent \$33,921,175.00 on a program that has included supplying textbooks, many of which are subpar and/or sitting in warehouses, for Afghan students

When the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001, President Bush articulated a clear message. “On my orders,” President Bush said, “the United States military has begun strikes against al Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime. ... These carefully targeted actions are designed to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations,

and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime.”⁸³

Who would have thought that after hearing those words, the United States would end up **paying nearly \$34 million — so far — for a program that has included providing subpar textbooks to Afghan schoolchildren as part of its efforts in Afghanistan?**⁸⁴

The failure was part of USAID’s Afghan Children Read (ACR) program, a 5-year program taking place from April 2016-April 2021 (with the full cost expected to clock in at **\$69,547,810**).⁸⁵ According to USAID, the ACR is a joint effort between it and the Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE) “1) To build the capacity of the MoE to develop, implement, and scale up a nationwide early grade reading curriculum and instruction program in public and community-based schools; and 2) To pilot evidence-based early grade reading curricula and instruction programs to improve reading outcomes for children in grades one through three in public and community-based schools.”⁸⁶



Unusable textbooks at an Afghan school, paid for with Americans’ tax dollars. Photo Credit: SIGAR.

Amazingly, the first accomplishment to which USAID points in a write up on the

program is that they have “[p]rinted and distributed 595,000 Early Grade Reading (EGR) teaching and learning materials, including textbooks. ...”⁸⁷

There appears to be more to the story, however, as a review by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) found in part that “[p]rincipals and teachers at a quarter of the schools inspected stated, ‘that the books were no longer in usable condition.’”⁸⁸ Along the way, SIGAR also found significant “book quality deficiencies, such as, loose or blank pages, misspellings, and low quality paper.”⁸⁹



Some of the 154,000 USAID-funded textbooks sitting in storage, with these located at the Herat Field Office in Enjil, Herat, Afghanistan. Photo Credit: SIGAR.

When SIGAR inspected warehouses where ACR books were being kept, it found a sad state of affairs. It reported that “**five storage facilities held about 154,000 textbooks.**”⁹⁰ One might think it’s good to have that many books in storage, ready to be delivered. However, SIGAR said that “[m]anagers at four out of the five facilities stated that they had no plan to distribute the books in the near future.”⁹¹ It “also observed that some of the facilities were not in good condition,” including one that “was not equipped with a ventilation system to preserve the books.”⁹²

What's worse? USAID's grantee responsible for printing and distributing the books does not seem to recognize a problem. When faced with its shortcomings, it superficially agreed with SIGAR's findings but attempted to explain away issues SIGAR raised, the FSO Subcommittee has learned, including shifting blame to parents, students, and school officials in its response to SIGAR discovering textbook bindings falling apart.⁹³

Here's something else we suspect would have a hard time staying intact: the argument for why American taxpayers have to spend so much money funding this textbook example of government waste.

WASTE, WITH EXTRA CHEESE

USAID spent part of a \$22,000,000.00 project working to bring Serbian cheese up to international standards

Who doesn't like a good piece of cheese? Whether its cheddar, Swiss, provolone, or simply American cheese, everybody has their preference. **And thanks to USAID, your new favorite might eventually be from Sjenica, Serbia!**

That's right! USAID spent part of a \$22 million "Sustainable Local Development Project"⁹⁴ training the staff at the Regional Center for Agricultural Development (RCAD) in Sjenica, Serbia,⁹⁵ to follow the cheese standards of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and help producers adopt best practices.⁹⁶ USAID reports the head of the center as stating, **"Our ultimate goal is to be able to guarantee the Sjenica**

cheese standards and quality to the consumers in the EU, US, and further."⁹⁷

What tangible skills did USAID help impart? Well, "RCAD's staff was trained to introduce and implement ISO standards, to properly sample milk and meat products at local farms, to calibrate laboratory equipment, and to advise farmers on improving the safety and quality of their products," a company that implemented the overall Development Project reported.⁹⁸

"The project also trained 30 dairy and livestock farmers and processors on how to improve production practices and meet laboratory standards," they noted, going on to also say it "engaged a local backstopping expert to assist the laboratory staff during critical phases of the accreditation process. ..."⁹⁹

In recent years on the domestic side, the U.S. has been experiencing a massive, historic cheese surplus, one that would eventually hit 1.4 billion pounds — which NPR noted in its report "means that there is enough cheese sitting in cold storage to wrap around the U.S. Capitol."¹⁰⁰

So American dairy farmers dealing with the realities of this situation might be cheesed off to learn their government worked to strengthen competition and the European cheese market — using their own tax dollars to boot!

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⁵ UnSuck DC Metro "Complaint of UnSuck DC Metro v. Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority." *UnSuck DC Metro*, April 29, 2019.

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¹¹ Siddiqui, Faiz, "For Metro, Getting 'Back2Good' Comes with a Six-Figure Price Tag." *The Washington Post*, January 4, 2017.

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¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Maryland Department of Transportation, "Letter to WMATA Board of Directors." *Maryland Department of Transportation*, July 1, 2019.

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¹⁵ *Ibid.*

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<https://wtop.com/tracking-metro-24-7/2019/06/metro-to-offer-limited-lyft-discounts-in-place-of-late-night-buses-trains/>.

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