

Testimony

of

Thomas A. Schatz,  
President,  
Citizens Against Government Waste  
before the  
Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information,  
and International Security

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Federal Funding of Museums

## Museums and Federal Funding

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the 1.2 million members and supporters of Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW). We are grateful to have the chance to expose the excessive waste that flows into earmarked museum projects. Mr. Chairman, we very much appreciate your leadership in the effort to enact effective earmark reform.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, CAGW has been cataloguing earmarks and reporting them in our *Congressional Pig Book* since 1991. Our seven-point criteria to identify pork-barrel spending was developed in conjunction with the bipartisan Congressional Porkbusters Coalition. These criteria are:

- The project was requested by only one chamber of Congress;
- The project was not specifically authorized;
- The project was not competitively awarded;
- The project was not requested by the President;
- The project greatly exceeds the President's budget request or the previous year's funding;
- The project was not the subject of a hearing; and,
- The project only serves a local or special interest.

In the first *Pig Book*, CAGW recorded 546 projects totaling \$3.1 billion. Unfortunately, those numbers have grown exponentially. Earlier today, CAGW released the *2006 Congressional Pig Book*. In fiscal year 2006, appropriators funded 9,963 projects, totaling \$29 billion in pork. The dollar figure was a record amount, 6.2 percent higher than last year's total of \$27.3 billion. That occurred despite a 29 percent drop from the record 13,997 projects in fiscal 2005. In total, since 1991, CAGW has uncovered 76,421 projects and \$241 billion in pork.

As funding continues to grow for the war on terrorism and unforeseen events such as Hurricane Katrina, the federal government must start exercising fiscal restraint and members of Congress must curb the desire to fund pet projects. Some of the more egregious examples of pork-barrel spending come in the form of funding for museum projects. Since 1995, appropriators have poured \$527.4 million into 1,030 museum-related earmarks, with a total of \$27.3 million for 79 projects in fiscal year 2006.

The Institute of Museum and Library Sciences is an independent grant making agency that provides funding to museums and libraries in an attempt to augment learning and promote cultural heritage. It provides funds on a competitive basis. In 2006, it has provided funding for eight museum projects, five of which are in New Orleans and one of which is in Biloxi, Mississippi. The highest amount provided is \$150,000. At least this agency is trying to help the Gulf Coast recover from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

But that is not the case with members of Congress, who, rather than providing additional funds to the museum and library institute, decided to pick “worthy” museums themselves. The \$27.3 million for 79 museum projects was spread among the Science, Commerce, Justice and State; Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education; Interior; and Treasury, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development appropriations bills.

Among those projects was the poster child of pork for fiscal year 2006, the Sparta Teapot Museum, located in Sparta, North Carolina. Like several other museum projects, the teapot museum received a double appropriation in the fiscal 2006 Transportation/Treasury/Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Act. Both the city of Sparta and New River Community Partners, Inc., the company responsible for the building of the museum, received \$250,000 for construction of the Sparta Teapot Museum, for a total of \$500,000. Supporters of the project claim that the museum “will expose its visitors to an unexpected art form – the teapot.”

The museum was proposed in the hope that it would increase tourism to the economically deficient town. Officials from the New River Community Partners project that the museum will attract 60,000 additional visitors to Sparta, a town with a population of 1,118. However, one official noted that there is no way of determining whether or not the museum will draw substantial crowds. The town itself is located 77 miles from Winston-Salem – making it the museum in the middle of nowhere – and it is doubtful that tourists will make the trip simply to see a teapot museum. State Representative Jim Harrell referred to the museum as a crap shoot. Regardless of the circumstances, taxpayers do not deserve to see their hard-earned money gambled away on this project.

Another example from this year’s *Pig Book* is the Youth Health Museum, also known as the Youzeum, in Boone County, Missouri which received \$750,000 in fiscal year 2006. Although the idea for this museum was hatched more than a decade ago, a location for the project was not established until September 2003. The president of the museum board claims that the lack of location was actually positive because it allowed the organization the chance to expand the center. However, taxpayers are consistently footing the bill for excessive time spent on these types of projects.

It is bad enough that these projects receive a one-time appropriation, but they often receive multiple earmarks in one fiscal year. For example, in fiscal 2006, the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services in Dearborn, Michigan received \$550,000 for construction of a museum and \$600,000 for museum expansion. This project was guilty of the same offense in fiscal year 2005 when it received \$100,000 for exhibits and museum programs and \$169,750 for construction of the museum. Only in Washington could money be appropriated to expand a museum that is still being constructed.

Other examples of the excessive waste in museum projects have occurred in past years; there is no guarantee these projects won't receive additional funds in the future. One of the most expensive has been The Please Touch Me Museum in Philadelphia, which received \$5.2 million between 2001 and 2005. This museum was created with the intent to establish hands-on learning for children. Although the museum has a \$10 admission fee, appropriators continue to stick taxpayers with the bill. Taxpayer's wallets have been touched enough.

In fiscal year 2005, taxpayers paid \$1.5 million for the Anchorage Museum of History and Art's Transit Intermodel Depot, otherwise known as a bus stop. In this case, not only were the taxpayers responsible for the costs of the museum, but they also paid the bill for a bus stop that lies near the building. The director of public transportation in Anchorage, Tom Wilson, expressed his disbelief and concern about how to spend the money. In a May 2005 MSNBC article Wilson claimed, "It is going to be a showpiece stop. We have a senator (Ted Stevens) that gave us the money and I certainly won't want to appear ungrateful." However, Wilson was also concerned that the public would view the first-class bus stop as wasteful and insisted that he would only spend what was necessary. Plans for the bus stop included top-of-the-line seating and lighting, electronic signs, and heated sidewalks. Wilson stated, "If it only takes us \$500,000 to do it, that's what we will spend." Five hundred thousand dollars is about 50 times the average amount spent on a bus stop.

A *Wall Street Journal* article published on December 27, 2005 noted that rural museums are becoming an entity of the past. As visitor numbers begin to decline, the demand for smaller museums in rural areas is dropping as well. If this is the case, why are appropriators continuing to pour funding into these declining projects? Without a steady stream of tourists, these museums will not be self-sustaining and will continue to rely on government funding to keep them afloat.

It is clear that the pork-barrel funding going toward these museum projects is unnecessary and excessive. Appropriators must start demonstrating some fiscal responsibility and exercising fiscal restraint in order to meet the more essential problems that face this country.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify.