


FEDERAL FUMBLES



A PLAYBOOK FOR DOGE



SENATOR JAMES LANKFORD

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My fellow taxpayers,

You have spoken, giving Congress and the President a clear mandate to make the government more efficient. In previous editions of *Federal Fumbles*, I highlighted ways the federal government has dropped the ball. In this special edition, I focus on persistent inefficiencies within the federal government and methods to save billions of taxpayer dollars, while restoring an effective government.

By now, you have heard of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). As a founding member of the Senate DOGE Caucus, my goal is to create a roadmap for DOGE, identifying key areas within the federal government and solutions to fix them. This special edition focuses on five major areas that cover a vast array of problems within the federal government, paired with the most valuable policy (MVP) that can address each issue either through legislative action or executive action.

Since my last edition of *Federal Fumbles* in 2023, our national debt has grown over \$5 trillion—we are now over \$36 trillion in debt. It is time to stop talking about what we can do and start acting on what we should do. The damage has already been done, but that should not stop us from repairing and restructuring the way government works. It is time to stop fumbling and start scoring.

In God We Trust,



James Lankford
United States Senator for Oklahoma



Fraud & Improper Payments

Payments

FAKING A MULTI-BILLION DOLLAR INJURY

An improper payment is when the federal government pays an incorrect amount of money or makes a payment that should not have been made at all.[1] It's waste no matter what program it is in. Out of the \$236 billion in improper payments made in FY2023, \$100 billion (43%) was in the Medicare and Medicaid programs, which led to overpayments, inaccurate recordkeeping, and even fraud. No one should protect fraud and waste, even if it is in Medicare.[2]

A man in California was sentenced to 10 years in prison for conspiring to conceal his involvement in operating a laboratory and billing Medicare approximately \$234 million, despite his decades-long exclusion from the Medicare program.[3]



MVP?

Congress must act diligently to fix the improper payment issues within the Medicare and Medicaid programs. Congress must provide guidance to ensure there are comprehensive measures within these programs that serve the American people and protect their tax dollars. Passing legislation to fix how doctors, providers, and hospitals are paid through Medicare would be a step in the right direction.



Fraud & Improper Payments

SNAP OVER THE QB'S HEAD

The Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a key player in providing food assistance to low-income Americans. However, in FY2023, the program saw an improper payment rate of 11.7%—that's about \$10.5 billion in taxpayer dollars to people who do not qualify for SNAP.[4] This was a huge jump in the improper payment rate in FY2019, which was 7.37%.

The Department of Agriculture's Inspector General conducted a review in July 2024 and found USDA did not comply with the Payment Integrity Information Act in FY2023.[5] The lack of compliance led to billions of dollars being wasted. For example, a grocery store owner in Lynchburg, Virginia, was arrested in January 2025 for food stamp fraud—illegally cashing in more than \$104,000 in SNAP funds, in just one store.[6]

MVP

Congress can fix improper payments within the SNAP program by designating SNAP and other federal programs that issue more than \$100 million a year to individuals as “vulnerable to fraud.” If Congress does this, these programs would go through a more extensive review process, which would shed light on inefficiencies within the programs and provide greater oversight to protect taxpayer dollars.

Fraud & Improper Payments

BLOWN COVERAGE

The Department of Labor is home to the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Program. This program is a safety net for individuals who lose their jobs through no fault of their own.[7] A report from the Office of the Inspector General found that “at least \$191 billion in pandemic UI payments could have been improperly paid, with a significant portion attributed to fraud.”[8] An outside entity has found the fumble could be as high as \$400 billion in improper payments.[9]

In one instance, a CFO of a major company in New York committed \$67 million in UI fraud, which led to this individual’s arrest in the summer 2024.[10]

MVP

The statute of limitations to prosecute pandemic fraud runs out at the end of 2025. I’ve introduced the Recover Fraudulent COVID Funds Act, which would extend the statute of limitations for prosecuting Unemployment Insurance fraud and all other pandemic-related fraud from five years to ten years. By passing this bill, we will be able to continue tracking down those who defrauded taxpayers and make sure justice is served.



Energy Incompetence

RUNNING ON FUMES

The Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) is meant to be used during times of national emergency or war. Under the Biden Administration, the SPR was drained of nearly 300 million barrels of oil to try to control energy markets and to cover their outrageous anti-energy policies. Now the Reserve is running on fumes, having dropped to 346.76 million barrels, compared to the 638.08 million barrels that were there under the first Trump Administration.[11] After tapping into the Reserve, the Biden Administration only refilled 47.06 million barrels—or 15% of what was taken to cover his anti-energy policies. The whole reason we have a strategic reserve is to protect the American people in times of crisis, not for manipulating the oil markets.

MVP

We must begin to use our resources here at home to refill the Reserve. We start that by undoing the Biden Administration's radical climate change policies that put a stop to drilling. By overriding President Biden's orders, we can refill the tanks of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.



Energy Incompetence

BEHIND IN THE RANKINGS

Right now, the United States ranks second to last in bringing a mine online—just ahead of Zambia. On average, it takes 29 years to get a mine up and running in the United States because of on the slow, costly, and uncertain permitting process. Even if a mine clears all federal permits, it faces challenges from environmental litigation for years.

Take Copperwood in Michigan, Maturi in Minnesota, and Lithium Nevada in Nevada, for example. Each of these mines have been waiting more than 16 years to get in the game, but due to red tape they are still sitting on the sidelines.[12]

MVP

The United States has incredible resources; however, the left has established rules and regulations to stop us from competing with the world. Congress and the Trump Administration should work together to pass legislation to allow quicker permitting and better access to our nation's vast mineral resources and to update the critical minerals list.

Achieving these three key plays will ensure the United States dominates the resources game.



Energy Incompetence

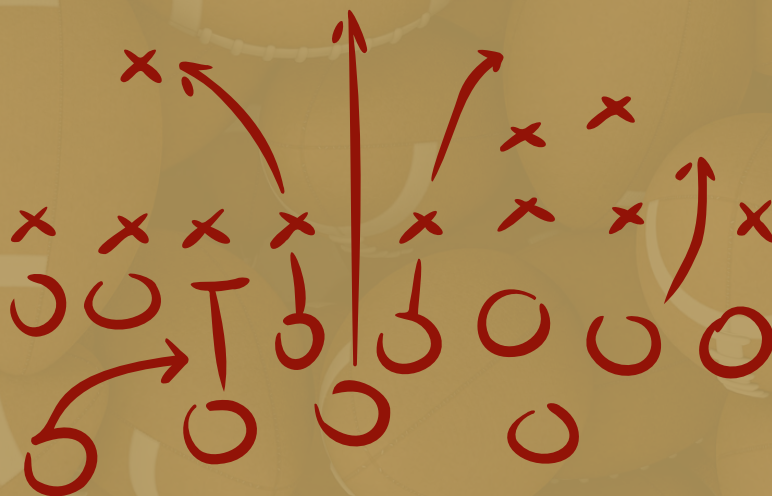
STUCK IN THE BACKFIELD

In 2021, President Biden signed into law an infrastructure bill that allocated \$7.5 billion to build half a million Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations.[13] Four years later, only seven have been built. Americans are left wondering where all that money went.

Biden's radical Executive Orders called for 40 percent of all federal climate and environmental programs to benefit "underserved communities." [14] Additionally, those applying for this funding must submit reports on how they would pursue "equity" at every step of construction. [15] These additional hurdles have caused delays, driven up costs, and kept the program from moving forward.

MVP

President Trump, through Executive Order, has already ended all Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs throughout the federal government. The next step is to allow the free market to build EV charging stations, not the taxpayer. Tax dollars didn't build gas stations, why are taxpayers buying EV stations?



Energy Incompetence

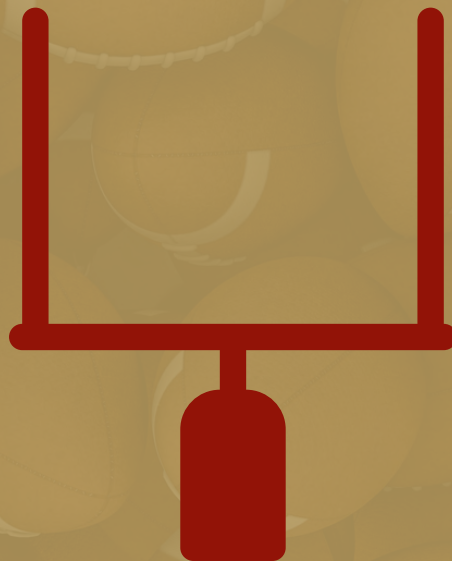
LETTING CHINA RUN UP THE SCORE

The Advanced Manufacturing Production Credit, also known as the “45X Credit,” is a tax credit under the Biden-Era Inflation Reduction Act intended to promote clean energy production in the U.S. The tax credit subsidizes the production of solar and wind energy components, battery parts, inverters, and critical minerals.[16]

Biden’s radical clean energy policies have let Chinese companies cash in on American tax dollars. For example, Trina Solar, one of China’s largest solar manufacturers, is building a massive panel factory in Texas, which could result in more than \$1 billion in subsidies.[17] Similarly, Gotion, a California-based company owned by a Chinese parent company, is setting up an EV battery plant in Michigan, eyeing more American taxpayer dollars.[18]

MVP

Congress must repeal the Advanced Manufacturing Production Credit. This will end the massive subsidies flowing to Chinese companies. Additionally, Congress must pass my Security and Oversight for International Landholdings Act (SOIL Act). My legislation would give the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) the power to review agricultural investments made by foreign nationals or entities from nonmarket economies or nations posing national security risks.[19]



Energy Incompetence

BLITZING OUR OWN TEAM

Under the Biden Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) called for new regulations straight out of the Green New Scam playbook. These new regulations targeted coal power plants, requiring a 90% reduction in emissions by 2032.[20] In other words, if the regulation is fully implemented, these rules would force almost all coal power plants to shut down in 15 years (by 2040), regardless of what the cut off could mean for our stable electricity grid.

The EPA did not stop there—it also went after natural gas. The new rules demand reductions of up to 90%, putting more pressure on natural gas plants to meet impossible standards or face a complete shutdown.[21]

MVP

America needs more reliable energy, not less. Under the Trump Administration, we must end all Green New Scam regulations and allow our immense energy resources to fuel the future.



Energy Incompetence

GREEN NEW SCAM INCOMPLETION

Another regulation from the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires two-thirds of all vehicles on the road to be electric by 2032.[22] Even though the Biden Administration wanted to cut coal and natural gas electricity generation, the majority of EV charging stations are powered by coal and natural gas.

Contractors faced endless delays and red tape building charging stations, making progress virtually impossible. Ultimately, this was a massive failure by the Biden Administration. Americans do not want their government to choose their car for them.

MVP

President Trump has already paused all federal funding appropriated through the Inflation Reduction Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act; however, Congress must tackle the long-term effects of this program by ending it once and for all.



Wasteful Spending

TACKLING HIGH DRUG PRICES

One of the costliest fumbles the federal government makes comes from Medicare prescription drug prices. In 2023, the United States spent a staggering \$722.5 billion on prescription drugs—more than any other country.[23] In 2025, Medicare Part D alone is projected to spend \$137 billion on prescription drugs.[24]

This outrageous spending comes from the practice within Medicare plans to cover expensive drugs rather than cheaper drugs, resulting in higher costs for the patient and the Medicare system. Take high cholesterol medication, for example: The brand-name drug cost \$5.78 per unit before a generic competitor entered the game at just \$0.08 per unit.[25] However, Medicare's slow coverage approval process takes more than three years for generics, compared to the roughly one year it takes for commercial drugs to get covered. This means Americans pay higher drug prices because the free market cannot operate.[26]

MVP

Back in *Federal Fumbles Vol. 6*, I warned about the rising costs in Medicare part D, yet Congress still has not taken decisive action in this arena.

It is time for Congress to act. Medicare must start prioritizing lower-cost prescription drugs, not the highest. We also need to restructure how Medicare categorizes generic and name-brand drugs so recipients can clearly see the cost difference and choose the best option.

This plan will save Medicare recipients money and keep the federal government from wasting more taxpayer dollars.

Wasteful Spending

FUNDING OUR RIVALS

After the disastrous 2021 withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Taliban—a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO)—took control of the country’s government. Since then, the United States has sent nearly \$2 billion in foreign aid assistance to Afghanistan.[27] So here is the question: Has the United States government been funding a Foreign Terrorist Organization?

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) seems not to think so. In a 2024 report, USAID stated that no aid money has been intercepted by the Taliban since they took control of the Afghan government.[28] However, according to a May 2024 report from the Special Inspector General from Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the Taliban have directly received nearly \$11 million in American taxpayer dollars since 2021.[29]

MVP

The United States government must implement a tougher, more comprehensive screening process to vet organizations and partners receiving aid. There is a massive hole in the United States’ foreign aid assistance program, and we must start protecting the American taxpayer dollar.

Careless Agencies

UNDERCUTTING THE HOME TEAM

The United States government funds two distinct entities for the purpose of broadcasting news internationally and domestically: the U.S. Agency of Global Media (USAGM) and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). These entities are supposed to deliver news and information about the greatest nation in the world. Instead, they are fumbling taxpayer dollars.

USAGM oversees Voice of America (VOA) and the office of CUBA Broadcasting (OCB), broadcasting news to regions with limited press freedom. In FY 2024, \$956 million was spent showcasing United States government scandals and weaknesses within our country.[30] For example, an article in 2024 focused on whether President Trump's Christian faith is contributing to the decline in Christianity in America.[31] This is not a winning strategy for advancing America's interest throughout the world.

In addition to publishing negative stories about America, between 2010-2020 USAGM did not address security concerns found by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI).[32] Many staff members had not been adequately vetted before they received security clearances. Consequently, OPM has revoked USAGM's authority for security clearances.[33]

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) funnels federal funding into public media outlets like NPR and PBS. Although it is supposedly a private organization, CPB raked in \$535 million from congressional appropriations, with \$357.9 million going to TV grants and \$119.3 million for radio expenses. [34]

MVP

A straightforward solution to address concerns regarding the funding and operations of these federally funded broadcasting entities would be to establish content accountability frameworks to require USAGM to follow the guidance of OPM, ODNI, and other federal entities. Taxpayer dollars should not be allocated to organizations that do not play by the rules. We must have strict oversight. Additionally, taxpayers should not be forced to pay for news that harms the reputation of our country.

Careless Agencies

RUNNING UP THE SCORE

The student loan debt crisis has been piling up for the past five years, exceeding more than \$1.7 trillion.[35] In 2020, the first Trump Administration called for a pause on student loan collection during the COVID-19 pandemic. The temporary relief measure amounted to a five-year fumble by the Biden Administration.

Biden kept pushing a narrative that student loans would be forgiven. In a critical Supreme Court ruling, the Court found President Biden had no authority to wipe out student debt. However, that did not stop President Biden from finding other ways to shift the burden onto the taxpayer. As of November 2024, the Biden Administration forgave five million borrowers, totaling more than \$175 billion. Who is paying for that? You, the taxpayer.

In one example, a graphic design student from the 1990s was still paying off her loans. In February 2023, she got a letter saying her loans were approved for discharge. By May of 2024, her \$82,000 in student debt was wiped clean by Biden's radical policy.[36]

Since student loans fall under mandatory spending, the federal government is legally required to pay off any forgiven debt—meaning taxpayers are left paying for someone else's degree.[37]

MVP

It's simple: Let's get back to financial accountability. People must take responsibility for the loans and pay them back. This will restore fairness in our federal student loan system and relieve taxpayers from paying for others' responsibilities. Simply put, when you sign a piece of paper saying you will pay your loan, you should pay your loan.

Careless Agencies

BIDEN'S BIGGEST FUMBLE

Arguably the biggest fumble of the Biden Administration was the way they handled the southern border. Specifically, how the U.S. Customs and Border Protection released hundreds of thousands of illegal aliens into this country with a piece of paper asking them to self-report to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for processing anywhere in the country. Four years later, ICE still has not processed most of those illegal aliens, and ICE has projected it will take until 2032 to complete processing for those they can find.

Here are the numbers: The total number of illegal aliens who were released with a sheet of paper and told to report to ICE for processing within 60 days is 810,310. The total number of illegal aliens given a piece of paper, told to report, and assigned a court date many years in the future is 353,585. The total number of illegal aliens who tried to report to ICE and were told to come back at a later date is 203,890. Finally, the total number of illegal aliens who did not follow the rules and disappeared into our country is 252,835.[38] All those numbers add up to a total, chaotic mess.

MVP

President Trump is already taking decisive action on his promises to protect Americans. From reinstating the “Remain in Mexico” policy to empowering ICE to deport illegal aliens, our communities will quickly become a safer place for all Americans. However, Congress must still pass legislation to prevent any future president from allowing illegal aliens into the country with no vetting and to close the asylum loophole.

Careless Agencies

A BROKEN PLAYBOOK

Every year, the federal government allocates billions of dollars to support communities in disaster relief efforts. However, this assistance is scattered across more than 30 different federal agencies, creating a challenge for communities trying to navigate the complex system and access the aid they need.[39] The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) serves as the primary federal entity responsible for coordinating disaster response and recovery. Other agencies, such as the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Transportation, the Small Business Administration, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, also play a significant role in providing disaster relief.[40] The fragmentation across these agencies stems from state and local officials reporting difficulties in obtaining timely support due to the disjointed system. To see the various agencies involved, see the chart on page 19. Each agency involved has its own unique requirements and paperwork, adding to the administrative burden and delaying critical assistance.

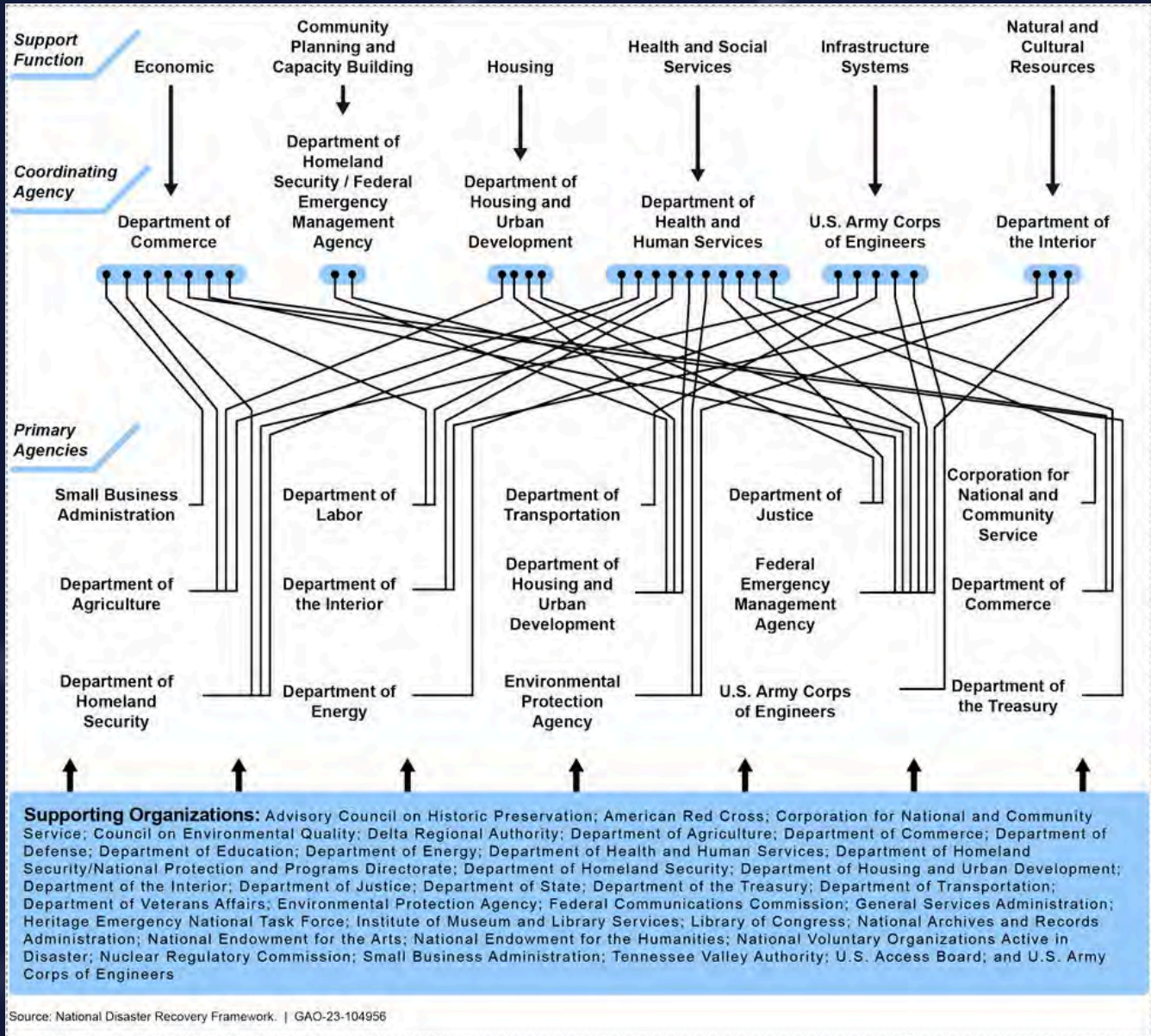
MVP

Congress must take action to provide oversight and accountability for the numerous agencies involved in disaster relief efforts. My proposed legislation, the Natural Disaster Resilience and Recovery Accountability Act, seeks to address this need by establishing a dedicated commission tasked with examining and recommending administrative and legislative reforms for all of America's federal disaster relief programs. These reforms aim to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and fiscal responsibility of federal disaster relief programs and activities.

By passing this legislation, Americans can depend on a more cohesive and reliable disaster relief system, ensuring swift and effective responses during times of crisis. Additionally, this measure will provide transparency and accountability, giving taxpayers confidence that their hard-earned dollars are being used to help fellow citizens in their time of need.

Careless Agencies

The Chart below from GAO illustrates the various federal entities involved in disaster relief.



Inefficiencies

JUST A BAD CALL

Under the Biden Administration, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) finalized an unattainable, inefficient, and ineffective nursing home staffing mandate that will cripple our nation's long-term care facilities. The mandate calls for a minimum standard of staffing that will effectively raise the price for individuals in a nursing home or, worse, close the doors to nursing homes across the nation. As written, over 80 percent of facilities would be out of compliance with the rule—meaning these facilities would have to hire a significant number of new staff, costing \$43 billion over 10 years.[42]

For instance, based on outside analysis through Care Providers of Oklahoma, the state's nursing home trade association, 0.003% of Oklahoma nursing homes would be able to meet all the requirements. In total, it would cost Oklahoma nursing homes around \$76 million annually, including hiring about 800 new nurses in these facilities. Nearly every nursing home would be impacted by this rule, particularly those in rural areas where there are already fewer nurses available to hire.

MVP

The most efficient way to combat the Biden nursing home rule is to simply repeal the order. By stopping its implementation, the federal government would save \$22 billion, and allow loved ones in rural areas to get care in their home communities.[43]

Inefficiencies

BENCHES ARE EMPTY

There are many benefits to a well-managed telework system when it is properly executed. However, over the past four years, we have witnessed the consequences of poorly managed telework. A 2023 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found 17 out of 24 federal agencies were using just 25% or less of their building capacity.[44] Despite this, taxpayers continued to pay \$8 billion annually to maintain and lease these underutilized office spaces –plus an additional \$7.7 billion in energy costs to keep them running.[45]

The wasteful spending does not stop there. Another report revealed billions of dollars were spent on new furnishings for these barely occupied office spaces. This form of reckless spending is another example of the inefficiencies within the federal government.

MVP

On his first day back in office, President Trump signed a critical Executive Order to end blanket federal agency telework. His Executive Order directed agency heads to take necessary steps to terminate remote work and return all federal employees to in-person work, while allowing exceptions when necessary.[46] This was a much-needed step in the right direction.

However, Congress must do more. Many federal agency buildings are simply too large to house current agency staff. Congress must reassess the federal agency real estate footprint, while also looking at the best ways to implement telework supervision and locality pay. Maximizing efficiency and saving money must be at the forefront of tackling remote work.

Inefficiencies

TEAMMATES NOT CONNECTING

It has now been over 1,000 days since President Biden signed into law his \$42.45 billion Broadband Equity, Access, and Development (BEAD) plan.[47] The goal of the BEAD plan was to expand internet access; however, not a single home or business has benefited from the exceedingly expensive plan.

The simple question to ask is *why?* The Biden Administration wrapped the BEAD plan in extensive red tape, such as climate change rules, preference for union labor, and DEI goals, which caused delays and increased costs.[48] The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has the authority to administer the funds. However, states must go through a maze of DEI requirements to receive any funding.[49] For example, in Oklahoma, companies must fill out different qualification forms, then the Oklahoma Broadband Office has one year to submit a final proposal to NTIA for approval.[50] Then the NTIA will release the initial 20% of funds. The Director of the Oklahoma Broadband Office anticipates Oklahoma will not receive funding until August of 2025, four years after the BEAD plan was signed into law.

MVP

I encourage President Trump to cut the exhaustive red tape. Any action taken must be in the best interest of the taxpayers and help ensure tax dollars are spent efficiently and effectively.

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