



2021 Pork Report

12 RECIPES FOR GOVERNMENT
WASTE, FRAUD, AND ABUSE

from the *Beacon Center of Tennessee*



MAKES OVER \$1 BILLION

Beale Street Irish Car Bombs

*One empty field
(marinated for 16 years)*

16 years of stale excuses

Billion Dollar Handout for Ford to Move to West Tennessee Megasite

After sitting vacant for 15 years, the Memphis Regional Megasite has finally found a tenant...and it's only costing hundreds of millions more in tax dollars. After legislators already allocated more than \$189 million to make the 4,100 acre site shovel-ready, the state called a special session to give another half a billion dollars to Ford Motor Company, along with nearly \$400 million more for infrastructure, legal fees, and the formation of a Megasite Authority, meaning taxpayers will have ponied up over \$1 billion, more than double the state budget for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, to lure the Mustang automaker to the state. The plant, dubbed "Blue Oval City," will produce Ford's all-electric F-150. Tennessee has a long history of giving multi-million dollar handouts to automakers, including General Motors, Volkswagen, Nissan, and Mitsubishi. Though billions have been given to some of the largest companies in the world, it never seems to be enough. Just this summer, the state gave \$60 million to GM and LG, on top of the millions given in the past, for the manufacturers to start producing electric vehicle batteries.

Many will remember that just a few years ago state lawmakers argued that the gas tax was too low to cover road repairs, so they subsequently raised it. However, lawmakers feel more than willing to hand over millions in hard earned tax dollars to companies making vehicles that won't pay any gas taxes at all.

<https://www.venturenashville.com/realty-check-memphis-regional-megasite-faces-sunset-timer-cms-2111>

<https://onthehill.tnjournal.net/price-tag-for-ford-megasite-deal-hits-884m/>

<https://www.bizjournals.com/nashville/news/2021/06/01/tennessee-60m-grant-ultium-cells.html>

Tennessee needs to hit the brakes on giving tax dollars to corporations, especially billion dollar ones, while pushing those costs onto everyday Tennesseans. If Tennessee wants to be the number one state for jobs and a magnet for business, lawmakers should make it easier and more affordable for all businesses to operate. While we welcome Ford to our state, taxpayers should be seeing red over the handouts involved in the deal, especially if Blue Oval City comes back later demanding more greenbacks.

SOLUTION

Instead of corporate handouts, focus on key reforms that actually drive relocations for businesses of all sizes like Franchise & Excise Tax reform and placing right-to-work in the state constitution.



easy to take
with you on your
free flight!

**MAKES \$2.8 MILLION**

Grab the Money and Go Snack Mix

*10,000 plane tickets**1 unnecessary government shutdown**Red tape, to taste*

Governor Lee's Program that Paid for Tourists to Visit Select Tennessee Cities

Roads. Police. Schools. Plane tickets for tourists? Government spending on the first three is expected. But tourism subsidies? That raised eyebrows across the political spectrum in July when Gov. Bill Lee announced that the state would give \$250 travel vouchers to anyone wanting to visit the Volunteer State's big four cities. The effort was launched in an attempt to boost a tourism industry that got shellacked during the pandemic. However well-intentioned, this is clearly not the role of government, and that's why the \$2.8 million price tag rankled Tennesseans from the Lt. Governor on down.

Undoubtedly, local tourism suffered during the height of the pandemic.. At one point, Nashville even had the largest drop in consumer spending of any city in America. But government shouldn't attempt to revive an industry with handouts, particularly when those handouts would go primarily to out-of-state residents and could only be spent on a select few cities, airlines, and hotels. To his credit, the governor didn't exacerbate the economic fallout from the pandemic like several local mayors did through elongated, inconsistent, and heavy-handed shutdowns. But rather than attempt to bail them out for their poor decisions, the state should instead curb their ability to shut down businesses and limit their capacity, actions which helped lead to the massive drop in tourism spending in the first place.

SOLUTION

Rein in local governments' authority to impose harmful restrictions on businesses during a state of emergency rather than bailing them out with state taxpayer money.

<https://www.timesfreepress.com/news/local/story/2021/jul/06/tennessee-governor-using-tax-money-fund-trave/549942/>

https://www.wsmv.com/news/report-says-nashville-saw-largest-consumer-spending-decrease-compared-to-other-u-s-metro-areas/article_79fd2a28-9974-11ea-84c5-b37e30906343.html

MAKES \$2.9 MILLION

Exhaust Smoked Ham with Nashville-Hot Honey Glaze

*Several hours to waste in line**

¼ cup of fake environmentalism

A Tax Dollar Grab through Outdated Emissions Testing

As President Reagan said, “The closest thing to eternal life on earth is a government program.” For a great example of this, look no further than Tennessee’s emissions testing program, where for years residents have been forced to line up at testing stations to have their vehicle emissions checked before they could renew their tags. All while vehicles have become more environmentally friendly, this program continued unabated. State lawmakers wised up back in 2018 when they voted to allow counties to end this unnecessary program. Yet it took the Environmental Protection Agency more than three years to approve their action, resulting in the state raking in an additional \$2.9 million a year for a program that it had decided it didn’t even want. Fortunately, the EPA finally got its act together and signed off on the state’s plan this past August, saving taxpayers boatloads of time and money.

But it’s still not time to celebrate if you live in Davidson County. Your Metro Council voted to keep this outdated and ineffective program in place, so you’ll have to keep lining up and forking over your hard-earned dollars for the illusion that you’re doing good by the environment. Leave it to the Metro Council to prove Reagan right yet again.

SOLUTION

Fight to return power to the state rather than in Washington, so that state leaders can make the best decisions for Tennesseans without needing federal approval.

<https://fox17.com/news/local/fox-17-investigates-why-are-tennesseans-paying-for-outdated-emissions-testing-program>

<https://www.tn.gov/environment/news/2021/8/17/tdec-announces-end-to-vehicle-emissions-testing-in-five-tennessee-counties-effective-jan--14--2022.html>



**If preparing in Davidson County*



smoke the
ham while
waiting in line



salt water
with taxpayer
dollars!





MAKES \$20 MILLION

Garlic and Wild Leek Park-Boiled Potatoes

5 million gallons of water

3 cloves of water slides

1 cup chopped hotel rooms, from about \$20 million in handouts

A Taxpayer-Funded Gift to the Construction of a Waterpark in Jackson

If you thought Opryland getting taxpayer dollars for a waterpark was a one time thing, you'd be wrong. Tennessee's 2021-2022 budget includes \$20 million for the construction of the Great Wolf Lodge Waterpark in Jackson, the country's largest indoor waterpark chain. This doesn't even include the local tax dollars that will almost certainly be included in the deal. The Jackson location, which is estimated to open in 2022 has a rough cost of \$150 million dollars. Based on the plan approved in 2020, the resort is designed to have 450 rooms and requires the construction of a \$5 million road to connect the resort to the main road, despite leaders not knowing where that money will come from. It's hard to understand how funding a private water park is an essential government service. If the Opryland waterpark handout in the city of Nashville is any indication, taxpayers of all political leanings don't like it when the government spends their hard-earned dollars on waterparks.

SOLUTION

Leave the water and amusement parks to the private sector and let consumer demand determine where they should be located.

<https://fox17.com/newsletter-daily/great-wolf-lodge-eyeing-tennessee-location-indoor-waterpark-development-economy-jobs-comeback-jackson-20-million-family-vacation>

<https://www.jacksonsun.com/story/money/business/2020/05/22/jackson-tn-approves-preliminary-designs-great-wolf-lodge-project/5230263002/>

<https://fox17.com/news/local/beacon-center-icitizen-poll-92-of-tennesseans-against-using-tax-money-for-water-park>



MAKES \$25 MILLION

Air Fryer Roasted Chestnuts

14 HEPA filters (do not add research)

1 year of virtual learning

3 cups of deceptive marketing

930,000 taxpayers on the hook

Shelby County Schools' \$25 Million Contract to Improve Air Quality

Before it could reopen for instruction, Shelby County Schools informed Governor Lee they needed money to improve air quality within the schools. The letter stated that they had gathered information and vetted various solutions and had identified a system that could do the job. Shelby County bought air purifiers made by Global Plasma Solutions, \$25 million worth to be exact. An engineering group that assisted Shelby County Schools with their reopening recommended the school district seek independent research on this technology, but at the time, no such research existed. A lawsuit was filed questioning the effectiveness of the purifiers, and it claims that Global Plasma Solutions preys on people desperate to clean the air by using deceptive marketing tactics. What's even worse is that Shelby County spent \$1 million for their installation after the lawsuit was filed. Whether they work or not, the installation in the school was 85% complete as of July.

According to county leaders, taxpayers should not be worried about the cost because the money didn't come from the general fund or other local dollars, but rather from COVID-19 relief money. Clearly, the county doesn't realize taxpayer money comes from taxpayer pockets, whether or not it's first rerouted through Washington, D.C.

SOLUTION

County leaders should always do their due diligence before making big purchases, especially ones regarding the air quality for children, and make sure they pass the smell test before spending millions on unproven products.

<https://www.localmemphis.com/article/news/investigations/i-team/25-million-spent-on-air-purifying-systems-at-shelby-county-jail-schools/522-26a7b160-1bbe-4c85-a259-e3371da540ea>

<https://www.scribd.com/document/479253538/SCS-Funding-Request-Letter-Indoor-Air-Quality-Improvements-Gov-Lee>

<https://www.commercialappeal.com/story/news/education/2020/10/27/shelby-county-schools-options-improving-air-quality-buildings/3749145001/>



On-Your- Pillow Chocolate Mints

MAKES \$2.5 MILLION

*\$2.5 million, coarsely
chopped*

*12 ounces of arbitrary,
nonsensical government
restrictions*

Shelby County Commission's Emergency-Fund Grant to Workers they Sidelined During COVID

In January 2021, the Shelby County Commission passed a resolution to give grants to hotel, restaurant, and hospitality workers. The resolution pulls \$2.5 million from the county's reserve fund, which exists for emergencies. The Commission clearly sees the impact of COVID-19 on the restaurant and hospitality industry as an emergency, but these industries suffered significantly more due to the government restrictions placed on businesses. The Shelby County Department of Health issued directives setting capacity limits at 25%, discouraging indoor dining, requiring restaurants to close at 10:00 PM, and imposing other arbitrary restrictions. The county is now having to hand out \$1,000-\$2,500 grants to clean up their own mess.



"emergency
chocolate"

Once again, the taxpayers are on the hook for paying for the decisions of local leaders. To make this story even more frustrating, nearly two months after the resolution passed, only 68 of more than 1,100 applications had been approved, but no money had been disbursed by the Urban League of Memphis, which oversaw the program.

SOLUTION

Limit a local government's ability to impose harmful restrictions on small businesses.

<https://www.fox13memphis.com/news/local/grant-will-give-25-million-restaurant-hotel-hospitality-workers/CSJ14ME7UZFVNFGZ5KQF4FLM34/>

<https://www.wreg.com/news/shelby-county-releases-new-rules-on-restaurants-during-pandemic/>

<https://www.localmemphis.com/article/money/records-show-lack-of-progress-payments-for-grant-program-intended-to-help-shelby-county-workers-impacted-by-pandemic/522-8ffdc8-208a-4337-baad-56df96c503ae>

MAKES \$810,000

Nutty Theater Popcorn Balls

7 cups drywall insulation, popped

1 brand new theater (completely unnecessary for taste)

Clarksville's Decision to Pay for a Performing Arts Center and then Raise Property Taxes

The Clarksville City Council should receive a Tony Award for its performance in pretending that taxpayers benefit from an \$810,000 performing arts center. In February 2021, the City Council voted 11-2 to pay for the construction of the center, which they will then lease to the Roxy Regional Theater Company for a whopping \$1 per year for the first three years. But wait...it gets way worse. Just four short months after approving this wasteful deal, the City Council came back to taxpayers and decided to raise their property taxes to pay for a new infrastructure plan. Clarksville taxpayers should be livid.

SOLUTION

Local governments should stop competing with the private sector by wasting tax dollars on non-essential luxury items like golf courses, sports stadiums, and theaters that are way outside of the scope of government. It's even worse when they then raise taxes to fund basic infrastructure in the process.

<https://clarksvillenow.com/local/city-council-oks-roxy-building-purchase-after-lengthy-debate/>

<https://clarksvillenow.com/local/city-budget-including-tax-increase-and-road-improvement-plan-gets-final-approval/>





free with your increased
property taxes!

Pork of the Year

Metro Nashville Public School's COVID Favoritism and \$18 Million No-Bid Contract with Meharry Medical Ventures

MAKES OVER \$18 MILLION

Over-Stuffed Baked Apples



take some apples
from your
teacher's desk!

12,000 13x9 empty desks

100 teaspoons of hypocrisy

4 lbs of favoritism

Logic (optional)

Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) may be the biggest offender in the whole Pork Report this year. In an absolutely nonsensical move, MNPS decided to shut down schools from any in-person learning because of the health risks of COVID, but at the same time partnered with the YMCA to offer free in-person childcare for Kindergarten through 5th grade students and, ironically, the children of MNPS employees. If the city decided COVID was so dangerous that they couldn't have any in-person learning for children, in what universe does it make sense to send a select group of students to the YMCA in order to...learn in-person.

Unfortunately for taxpayers, it gets much worse when it comes to the way MNPS wasted our money this year. Thanks to an investigation by Fox 17, it was discovered that MNPS agreed to a no-bid contract worth a whopping \$18 million of taxpayer money to partner with Meharry Medical Ventures for a COVID contract, getting essentially nothing in return. The no-bid contract produced a \$1.8 million website that barely works and has the visual appeal of AskJeeves.com. The website likely cost millions of dollars





more in monthly maintenance but the contract is so vague, it's almost impossible to know how much money MNPS wasted on this contract. The horrific website should have cost no more than \$75,000, and that is being extremely generous and includes the government's propensity for waste. Taxpayers need answers on why MNPS didn't accept other bids, who was overseeing this contract, who signed the contract, and why taxpayers got such a raw deal. This is either one of the most obvious examples of government incompetence in Pork Report history or straight up fraud.

SOLUTION

Governments should never give out no-bid contracts, especially when \$18 million is involved. Additionally, government contracts should be detailed and transparent. This horrific deal should be audited by the state to see where things went wrong and who is responsible for such a raw deal for taxpayers.

<https://www.wkrn.com/community/health/coronavirus/metro-schools-partnership-with-ymca-offers-free-childcare-after-labor-day/>

<https://fox17.com/fox-17-investigates/taxpayers-are-being-screwed-watchdog-group-calls-for-audit-into-mnps-18m-no-bid-contract-metro-nashville-public-schools-coronavirus-covid19-website-tennessee>

MAKES \$3.5 MILLION

Game-Day Chicken Wings with Caviar



2 spoonfuls of government shutdown

1 elitist committee

The Nashville Event Marketing Fund Committee's Continued Funding of Events that Only Benefit the Rich

Shutting down small businesses, limiting in-person activities like eating and drinking, and shutting down or limiting attendance at sporting events and concerts severely impacted Nashville's economic picture. Yet despite this major loss of tax revenue and money in the pockets of Nashvillians, the city still decided to give out millions of dollars to events that only benefit the rich. The Nashville Event Marketing Fund Committee gave out a combined \$3.5 million to money-making events (that were coming here anyway) such as Americana Fest and the always exciting Music City Bowl where an SEC team with at least five losses plays like the ninth best team in the ACC or Big Ten. The \$3.5 million is in addition to the “free” money from the CARES Act, which somehow paid for the Music City Grand Prix and Live on the Green, two events that have nothing at all to do with COVID. This is yet another example of the city of Nashville transferring tax dollars from the people who need the money to the people who don't.

SOLUTION

Disband the Nashville Event Marketing Fund, a slush fund for the well-connected at the expense of Nashville taxpayers. Metro should stop handing out taxpayer dollars to event organizers, especially those events already established in Nashville.



food to match the
event's price tag!



MAKES OVER \$13 MILLION

Cranberry-Orange Ballpark Pretzels



16 bases and 4 home plates

100 bikes, kayaks, and grills (to garnish)

Use grill for that “up in smoke” tax dollar flavor

Debt-Funded Baseball Fields and Taxpayer Waste in Johnson City

Johnson City residents are hopefully really big fans of baseball, because they will be paying big bucks for little league games. On top of what the city manager called an “extraordinarily large” budget, the city decided to take on \$13 million in debt to build five baseball diamonds. Adding to this mound of spending, Johnson City has allocated \$300,000 over the last two budgets for marketing to offer up to \$5,000 in grants for out-of-town individuals to move to the city, which in August 2021 was reported to have a majority of applicants coming from Middle Tennessee, Illinois, and Florida. Aside from the cash incentives, applicants can also play Johnson City’s version of The Price is Right to potentially get \$1,000 gift certificates towards a bike or kayak, free grills, discounted workspace, and sporting goods.

One would think local tax dollars would go to core government services, like roads and schools, to support those who actually paid local taxes, but I guess potential movers and baseball fields take priority. The CEO of the economic partnership involved in the program said some individuals he spoke with moved to Johnson City - skipping the incentive - because of the area’s own merits. If some new residents can see the upside to moving to Johnson City and Tennessee without incentives, why are they giving them out in the first place? Just like corporate welfare deals for big business, a one time \$5,000 grant isn’t going to be the determining factor for movers. Current residents of Johnson City should call out city leaders for the double play of bad policy and wasted taxpayer dollars.

SOLUTION

Elected officials should stop with the bush league plays and focus on core government services, not taking on debt for unnecessary special projects and incentives.

https://www.johnsoncitypress.com/news/johnson-city-passes-large-302m-budget-on-first-reading/article_708cefa-c4aa-11eb-b071-27bbe7663913.html

https://www.johnsoncitypress.com/news/program-offering-incentives-to-attract-remote-workers-nets-52-applications/article_e060f1bc-db3d-11eb-a355-d7453904489d.html

<https://www.wjhl.com/news/johnson-city-remote-worker-incentive-candidates-set-to-visit-city/>



use electricity for
that great char!



MAKES \$702 MILLION

Utility-Charred Knoxellini

3 scoops of dirt

Layer of noodly cables

Use marinade injector to insert tax dollars into a fatty pork project

A Needless Government-Run Broadband Plan from the Knoxville Utility Board

The Knoxville Utility Board (KUB) recently approved a plan to offer broadband internet to some local residents at a projected cost of \$702 million over 10 years. The plan follows multiple government-owned networks that have taken place in recent years and generally are a bad investment for taxpayers. In fact, the KUB issued its own reports in which it states that the government utility should not get involved in the broadband business. Recent measurements show that 98% of Knoxville residents already have multiple choices for broadband and 90% have gigabit speeds or higher, the same target speed as the KUB plan. Even though one existing provider already submitted a plan to expand its network to the small percentages of homes without broadband for \$22 million of private investment, the KUB decided a government-owned, wildly expensive program was the better choice. Even at dial-up speeds, some easy internet searching would quickly show policymakers that these types of programs are a bad investment.

SOLUTION

Local governments should not use tax dollars to inject themselves into sectors of the economy, especially when private businesses are ready and willing to meet those needs. Instead, governments should look at cutting red tape for communication infrastructure to make it easier for private investment to address local needs.

https://www.kub.org/uploads/COMBINED_-_Res_1432_2nd_Reading,_Res_1433_-_3-11-21_FINAL.pdf

<https://www.thecgo.org/research/are-government-owned-broadband-networks-effective/>

https://www.kub.org/uploads/White_Paper_2018.pdf

<https://broadbandnow.com/Tennessee/Knoxville?zip=37901>

<https://www.wbir.com/article/tech/knoxville-city-council-gives-blessing-for-plan-for-municipal-internet-from-kub-8-0/51-c704b8a8-a2d1-42ad-a872-49c26dc34242>



MAKES \$16 MILLION

Field Greens with Lemony Breadcrumbs

One giant field of greens

1 lemon of a project

A large pinch of crummy management

Hamilton County's \$16 Million Purchase of Mostly Unusable Land

Hamilton County commissioners must be fans of the movie *Field of Dreams* after spending \$16 million to buy 2,170 acres in hopes to turn it into a manufacturing hub. If commissioners watched the “if you build it, they will come” ideas that have already taken place right here in Tennessee, they might have left that concept in fictional movies where it belongs. (See the first entry in this *Pork Report* for proof.) On top of shelling out millions of tax dollars with the dream of making it a manufacturing hub, the actual cost of the land was way out of left field. In the County Commission meeting regarding the purchase, the mayor stated there were only about 600-700 acres that were ready for development, meaning the price for current usable land cost taxpayers nearly \$23,000 an acre. One can only hope this project doesn't continue to cost taxpayers like the countless government properties that require more funds than disclosed down the road.

SOLUTION

“If you build it, they will come” might be a good movie quote, but it makes for horrible policy. These types of deals historically have been a strikeout for taxpayers instead of a grand slam. Elected officials should stop short of spending tax dollars and instead seek to make it easier for businesses to operate in Tennessee.

<https://www.wrcbtv.com/story/44229194/update-hamilton-county-commission-grants-dollar16m-purchase-of-mcdonald-farm>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPZSTcgt74> (1:11:59)



this one's a
real "lemon"





About Beacon

The Beacon Center empowers Tennesseans to reclaim control of their lives, so that they can freely pursue their version of the American Dream. The Center is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan research organization dedicated to providing expert empirical research and timely free market solutions to public policy issues in Tennessee.

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