

infrastructure, our electrical grid and the physical building blocks of the Internet, which are vital to the success of startups and small businesses throughout the country.

Madam Speaker, in Connecticut and around the Nation, we need a budget that invests in STEM education and 21st century jobs, commits to growing our manufacturing sector, and provides the resources we need to fight the opioid epidemic that is tearing apart so many families.

The American public wants to see Congress take bold action. Our budget should set us on a path to leadership in today's and tomorrow's global economy.

A budget is much more than a statement of principles. It is a roadmap to lifting barriers to opportunity. It is an investment in our infrastructure and in the research and development we need to power 21st century careers. It is an investment in the American people.

It is time that we in this House put our responsibility to the American people before partisanship and political games. When the people we represent at home stop doing their jobs, they don't get paid.

In Congress, we should work the same way. We should pass the No Budget, No Pay Act because Members of Congress should only get paid when they do their jobs. If we worked under No Budget, No Pay, I guarantee you the House would have passed a budget last Friday.

So I call on my colleagues. Let's do the job the American people sent us here to do. Let's do the job we are paid to do. Let's go to the table—Democrats and Republicans—and hammer out a budget that supports good-paying jobs, grows our economy, keeps us safe, and truly reflects the priorities of the American people.

WASTING TAXPAYER MONEY IN AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Madam Speaker, I have brought to the floor today a prophetic political cartoon. Let me describe it very quickly.

There is Uncle Sam sitting in a wheelchair, and he shouts out with great excitement: I can see Greece from here. Behind the wheelchair pushing is President Obama. Behind President Obama is a donkey representing the Democratic Party, and behind the donkey is an elephant representing the Republican Party, the point being that all of us are guilty of heading this country towards Greece, and that means an economic collapse is forthcoming.

Madam Speaker, we are \$19 trillion in debt.

Another reason I am on the floor today is that the continued waste of the taxpayer money in Afghanistan is becoming astounding.

Madam Speaker, I include in the RECORD an article titled, "Report cites wasted Pentagon money in Afghanistan."

[From USATODAY.com, Jan. 20, 2016]

REPORT CITES WASTED PENTAGON MONEY IN AFGHANISTAN

(By Tom Vanden Brook)

WASHINGTON.—The embattled Pentagon agency blamed for building a budget-busting gas station in Afghanistan and renting luxury housing for its employees also imported Italian goats to boost the cashmere industry in the impoverished, war-wracked country, according to a government investigator.

Meanwhile, the former head of the Task Force for Business Stability Operations, Paul Brinkley, blasted back Wednesday at the government inspector general, accusing him of inaccuracy and hype.

At a Senate hearing, John Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR), said in prepared testimony that the task force lacked "strategic direction" and suffered from a "scattershot approach to economic development."

Among the more egregious examples of boondoggles he cited: "importing rare blond Italian goats to boost the cashmere industry." The \$6 million program included shipping nine male goats to western Afghanistan from Italy, setting up a farm, lab and staff to certify their wool.

A chart summarizing task force initiatives shows the inspector general did not conduct an audit of the program. The program, according to a contractor's analysis, may have created as many as 350 jobs. Sopko ripped the Pentagon and the task force for failing to track its spending. It's not unclear, for instance, if the goats were eaten.

"We don't know," Sopko said. "This was so poorly managed."

Sopko testified Wednesday on his report, "Preliminary Results Show Serious Management and Oversight Problems." The task force was charged with jump starting the economy of Afghanistan with nearly \$800 million in U.S. taxpayer funds.

Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., who chaired the hearing, called the allegations about the filling station troubling and called for a full accounting of task force spending.

"What happened to the money?" Ayotte asked. "All of it?"

Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., was livid about task force spending and called the natural gas-station program "dumb on its face," given the cost of converting cars to natural gas exceeds the average income of Afghans.

"This is a terrible waste of taxpayer money when we have so many other uses for it," McCaskill said.

In a letter and other documents, Brinkley, who led the task force in Iraq and later Afghanistan from 2006 to 2011, defended his oversight of the agency and lashed out at the government's watchdog.

"A meaningful and balanced review cannot be accomplished through a sustained media campaign or a practice of repeating uncorroborated allegations," Brinkley wrote to the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Sopko has released several provocative reports charging the task force with waste and shoddy accounting practices. Among the most eye-catching: a \$43 million natural-gas filling station that should have cost \$500,000 and proved of no use to average Afghans; and \$150 million spent on renting luxury villas for task force staff and visitors. Those alleged boondoggles have drawn ire from Capitol Hill and cast Brinkley as a profligate spender.

Brinkley, through his lawyer, bristled at the charge from the inspector general that

he had approved of programs without knowing their cost. Brinkley told investigators on Dec. 17 that his task force had no contracting authority, relying instead on career military officials to make deals within government regulations, according to his lawyer.

"This was done, in fact, in fact to ensure proper oversight—not to avoid it," Brinkley's lawyer, Charles Duross, wrote Wednesday to the inspector general's office.

The Pentagon on Wednesday also took issue with Sopko's price tag for the gas station, saying it was closer to \$5 million, not \$43 million. Brian McKeon, a top Pentagon policy official, said in a statement to USA TODAY that the methods used Sopko were "flawed, and the costs of the station are far lower."

The refueling station itself cost \$2.9 million, and the balance of the \$5 million paid for associated buildings and equipment, McKeon said.

Brinkley, in his letter, challenged the assertion that he and his staff lived in luxury, eschewing the basic, free accommodations offered by the military in Afghanistan.

In a previous report, Sopko criticized the task force for spending \$150 million on "western-style hotel accommodations" that included flat-screen TVs, private bodyguards and "three-star" menus for staff and guests. Bunking with the Army, Sopko suggested, could have saved taxpayers tens of millions of dollars.

Living conditions during his tenure, Brinkley wrote, were far from luxurious—"basic and minimal, with multiple bunks in shared living quarters" or on military bases.

"When this was not possible or practical, the challenge was to find facilities that did not continually smell of raw sewage, and food that did not frequently sicken our personnel or visiting government and business leaders—a challenge we never fully overcame," Brinkley wrote.

The task force's final grade is not yet in, McKeon said.

"Ultimately, time will tell whether the task force succeeded in its overall objectives," McKeon said. "Reports that the (Pentagon) commissioned to assess the Task Force's work—as well as SIGAR's work—tell us that the Task Force had a mixed record of success, with some successes and some failures."

Mr. JONES. In this story, John Sopko, the Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, tells that the worst boondoggle he has ever seen is the fact that the Department of Defense spent \$6 million to buy nine goats—nine goats—for \$6 million.

The sad thing about that is he testified before the Senate: We can't find the goats. What does that mean to the taxpayers? I don't know anymore. That is why they are so outraged, quite frankly.

Madam Speaker, I include in the RECORD a second article titled, "12 Ways Your Tax Dollars Were Squandered in Afghanistan."

[From NBC NEWS.com, March 5, 2016]

12 WAYS YOUR TAX DOLLARS WERE SQUANDERED IN AFGHANISTAN

(By Alexander Smith)

The United States has now spent more money reconstructing Afghanistan than it did rebuilding Europe at the end of World War II, according to a government watchdog.

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) said in a statement to Congress last week that when adjusted for inflation the \$113.1 billion plowed

into the chaos-riven country outstripped the post-WWII spend by at least \$10 billion.

Billions have been squandered on projects that were either useless or sub-standard, or lost to waste, corruption, and systemic abuse, according to SIGAR's reports.

NBC News spoke to SIGAR's Special Inspector General John F. Sopko about 12 of the most bizarre and baffling cases highlighted by his team's investigations.

Paraphrasing Albert Einstein, Sopko said the U.S.'s profligate spending in Afghanistan is "the definition of insanity—doing the same things over and over vain, expecting a different result."

The Pentagon spent close to half a billion dollars on 20 Italian-made cargo planes that it eventually scrapped and sold for just \$32,000, according to SIGAR.

"These planes were the wrong planes for Afghanistan," Sopko told NBC News. "The U.S. had difficulty getting the Afghans to fly them, and our pilots called them deathtraps. One pilot said parts started falling off while he was coming into land."

After being taken out of use in March 2013, the G222 aircraft, which are also referred to as the C-27A Spartan, were towed to a corner of Kabul International Airport where they were visible from the civilian terminal. They had "trees and bushes growing around them," the inspector general said.

Sixteen of the planes were scrapped and sold to a local construction company for 6 cents a pound, SIGAR said. The other four remained unused at a U.S. base in Germany.

Sopko called the planes "one of the biggest single programs in Afghanistan that was a total failure."

The Tarakhil Power Plant was fired up in 2009 to "provide more reliable power" to blackout-plagued Kabul, according to the United States Agency for International Development, which built the facility.

However, the "modern" diesel plant exported just 8,846 megawatt hours of power between February 2014 and April 2015, SIGAR said in a letter to USAID last August. This output was less than 1 percent of the plant's capacity and provided just 0.35 percent of power to Kabul, a city of 4.6 million people.

Related: U.S. Spent \$43M on Gas Station But Can't Explain Why

Furthermore, the plant's "frequent starts and stops . . . place greater wear and tear on the engines and electrical components," which could result in its "catastrophic failure," the watchdog said.

USAID responded to SIGAR's report in June 2015, saying: "We have no indication that [Afghan state-run utility company] Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS), failed to operate Tarakhil as was alleged in your letter."

U.S. officials directed and oversaw the construction of an Afghan police training facility in 2012 that was so poorly built that its walls actually fell apart in the rain. The \$456,669 dry-fire range in Wardak province was "not only an embarrassment, but, more significantly, a waste of U.S. taxpayers' money," SIGAR's report said in January 2015.

It was overseen by the U.S. Central Command's Joint Theater Support Contracting Command and contracted out to an Afghan firm, the Qesmatullah Nasrat Construction Company.

SIGAR said this "melting" started just four months after the building was finished in October 2012. It blamed U.S. officials' bad planning and failure to hold to account the Afghan construction firm, which used poor-quality materials. The U.S. subsequently contracted another firm to rebuild the facility.

Sopko called the incident "baffling." "Afghans apparently have never grown or eaten

soybeans before," SIGAR said in its June 2014 report. This did not stop the U.S. Department of Agriculture funding a \$34.4 million program by the American Soybean Association to try to introduce the foodstuff into the country in 2010.

The project "did not meet expectations," the USDA confirmed to SIGAR, largely owing to inappropriate farming conditions in Afghanistan and the fact no one wanted to buy a product they had never eaten.

"They didn't grow them, they didn't eat them, there was no market for them, and yet we thought it was a good idea," Sopko told NBC News.

"What is troubling about this particular project is that it appears that many of these problems could reasonably have been foreseen and, therefore, possibly avoided," the inspector general wrote in a letter to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack in June 2014.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built some 2,000 buildings to be used as barracks, medical clinics and fire stations by the Afghan National Army as part of a \$1.57-billion program. When two fires in October and December 2012 revealed that around 80 percent of these structures did not meet international building regulations for fire safety, Sopko said he was "troubled" by the "arrogant" response from a senior USACE chief.

Major General Michael R. Eyre, commanding general of USACE's Transatlantic Division, said the risk of fire was acceptable because "the typical occupant populations for these facilities are young, fit Afghan soldiers." Writing in a January 2014 memo published by SIGAR, Eyre said these recruits "have the physical ability to make a hasty retreat during a developing situation."

Sopko told NBC News that Eyre's comments "showed a really poor attitude toward our allies." He added: "It was an unbelievable arrogance, and I'm sorry to say that about a senior officer."

Despite the Department of Defense spending \$597,929 on Salang Hospital in Afghanistan's Parwan province, the 20-bed facility has been forced to resort to startling medical practices.

"Because there was no clean water, staff at the hospital were washing newborns with untreated river water," SIGAR's report said in January 2014. It added that the "poorly constructed" building was also at increased "risk of structural collapse during an earthquake."

NBC News visited the hospital in January 2014 and witnessed some disturbing practices: a doctor poking around a dental patient's mouth with a pair of unsterilized scissors before yanking out another's tooth with a pair of pliers.

Related: \$600K in U.S. Taxpayer Cash Buys Medieval Hospital in Afghanistan

The United States Forces-Afghanistan responded to SIGAR's report in January 2014 saying it would investigate why the building was not constructed to standard.

In a separate report, SIGAR said that USAID reimbursed the International Organization for Migration for spiraling costs while building Gardez Hospital, in Paktia province.

The IOM's "weak internal controls" meant it paid \$300,000 for just 600 gallons of diesel fuel—a price of \$500 per gallon when market prices should not have exceeded \$5, SIGAR said.

The so-called "64K" command-and-control facility at Afghanistan's Camp Leatherneck cost \$36 million and was "a total waste of U.S. taxpayer funds," SIGAR's report said in May 2015.

The facility in Helmand province—named because it measured 64,000 square feet—was intended to support the U.S. troop surge of 2010.

However, a year before its construction, the very general in charge of the surge asked

that it not be built because the existing facilities were "more than sufficient," the watchdog said. But another general denied this cancellation request, according to SIGAR, because he said it would not be "prudent" to quit a project for which funds had already been appropriated by Congress.

Ultimately, construction did not begin until May 2011, two months before the draw-down of the troops involved in surge. Sopko found the "well-built and newly furnished" building totally untouched in June 2013, with plastic sheets still covering the furniture.

"Again, nobody was held to account," Sopko told NBC News, adding it was a "gross . . . really wasteful, extremely wasteful amount of money."

He added: "We have thrown too much money at the country. We pour in money not really thinking about it."

A now-defunct Pentagon task force spent almost \$40 million on Afghanistan's oil, mining and gas industry—but no one remembered to tell America's diplomats in Kabul, according to SIGAR, citing a senior official at the U.S. embassy in the city.

In fact, the first the U.S. ambassador knew about the multi-billion-dollar spend was when Afghan government officials thanked him for his country's support, SIGAR said.

The project, administered by the Task Force for Business and Stability Operations (TFBSO), was part of a wider \$488 million investment that also included the State Department and USAID. These organizations "failed to coordinate and prioritize" their work, which created "poor working relationships, and . . . potential sustainability problems," according to SIGAR.

It was, according to Sopko, "a real disaster."

One USAID official told the watchdog it would take the U.S. "100 years" to complete the necessary infrastructure and training Afghanistan needs to completely develop these industries.

SIGAR said the U.S. military has been unable to provide records answering "the most basic questions" surrounding the mystery purchase and cancellation of eight patrol boats for landlocked Afghanistan.

The scant facts SIGAR were able to find indicated the boats were bought in 2010 to be used by the Afghan National Police, and that they were intended to be deployed along the country's northern river border with Uzbekistan.

"The order was cancelled—without explanation—nine months later," SIGAR said. The boats were still sitting unused at a Navy warehouse in Yorktown, Virginia, as of 2014.

"We bought in a navy for a landlocked country," Sopko said.

Despite the U.S. plowing some \$7.8 billion into stopping Afghanistan's drug trade, Afghan farmers are growing more opium than ever before," SIGAR reported in December 2014.

"Poppy-growing provinces that were once declared 'poppy free' have seen a resurgence in cultivation," it said, noting that internationally funded irrigation projects may have actually increased poppy growth in recent years.

The "fragile gains" the U.S. has made on Afghan health, education and rule of law were being put in "jeopardy or wiped out by the narcotics trade, which not only supports the insurgency, but also feeds organized crime and corruption," Sopko told U.S. lawmakers in January 2014.

Afghanistan is the world's leader in the production of opium. In 2013, the value of Afghan opium was \$3 billion—equivalent to 15 percent of the country's GDP—according to the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime.

Sopko told NBC News the picture is no more optimistic today. "No matter which

metric you use, this effort has been a real failure," he said.

The USAID-funded Shorandam Industrial Park in Kandahar province was transferred to the Afghan government in September 2010 with the intention of accommodating 48 business and hundreds of local employees. Four years later, SIGAR inspectors found just one active company operating there.

This was due to the U.S. military building a power plant on one-third of the industrial park to provide electricity to nearby Kandahar City, causing "entrepreneurs to shy away from setting up businesses" at the site, SIGAR said in its report of April 2015.

After the military withdrew in mid-2014, the investigators were told that at least four Afghan businesses had moved into the industrial park. However, SIGAR said that it could not complete a thorough inspection because USAID's contract files were "missing important documentation."

The DOD spent nearly \$82 million on nine incineration facilities in Afghanistan—yet four of them never fired their furnaces, SIGAR said in February 2015. These four dormant facilities had eight incinerators between them and the wastage cost \$20.1 million.

In addition, SIGAR inspectors said it was "disturbing" that "prohibited items," such as tires and batteries, continued to be burned in Afghanistan's 251 burn pits. U.S. military personnel were also exposed to emissions from these pits "that could have lasting negative health consequences," the watchdog said.

The Department of Defense said it was "vitaly interested in exploring all possible ways to save taxpayer dollars and ensure we are good stewards of government resources."

A spokesman added: "We'll continue to work with SIGAR, and other agencies, to help get to the bottom of any reported issues or concerns."

A spokesman for Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani declined to comment on this story.

Mr. JONES. Madam Speaker, we have already spent more in Afghanistan than it cost to rebuild Europe after World War II. In fact, last week I asked my staff to draft a letter to Speaker PAUL RYAN.

In the letter, I asked the Speaker of the House, PAUL RYAN, to meet with John Sopko, who is the Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, and listen to this absolute waste that is going on in Afghanistan.

Yet, sometime soon we will mark up the NDAA, National Defense Authorization Act, and I will guarantee you there will be billions of dollars in OCO funds going to Afghanistan.

There will be those of us on both sides of the aisle that would like to take that money out or significantly reduce the money. Last year it was over \$43 billion in OCO funds, which is nothing but a slush fund.

Madam Speaker, there is a famous line about Afghanistan. It says that Afghanistan is the graveyard of empires.

I predict today—but I hope I am wrong—if we continue to spend and waste billions of dollars in Afghanistan, there will be a headstone in that graveyard that says: USA.

I hope that does not happen. But we had better wake up, as Members of Congress, and stop supporting programs like money for Afghanistan that

are a total waste of the taxpayers' money.

Madam Speaker, I will ask God to continue to bless our men and women in uniform and ask God to continue to bless America.

TRIBUTE TO PAUL BARKLA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. KIND) for 5 minutes.

Mr. KIND. Madam Speaker, today I rise to celebrate the life and legacy of my good friend, Paul Barkla. I met Paul when I first ran for Congress. He was one of my earliest supporters.

I still vividly recall meeting him at the end of a Democratic primary debate when he introduced himself as a former Bill Proxmire staffer, as I was, and then promised to do everything he could to help me get elected. It was the beginning of a 25-year friendship, during which time he became a member of our family.

Paul is a native of the Pacific Northwest and was raised in Eugene, Oregon. Paul was a firm believer in good, old-fashioned, shoe-leather politics, and he pounded the pavement for Democratic candidates across the country, where he met many friends along the way.

In 2004, he traveled to New Hampshire to volunteer for the Presidential campaign of General Wesley Clark. In 2008, he again loaded up his dog and traveled around the country, showing up in battleground States and volunteering for President Obama. He believed we all had an obligation to participate in our democracy.

After college, Paul moved to Washington, where he received a master's degree from George Washington University and worked as a Capitol policeman.

He also went to work for numerous Congressmen and then worked for Senator Proxmire of Wisconsin, where he became engaged with Wisconsin politics.

It was during his time in Washington that he became active in the civil rights movement, participating in the March on Washington in August 1963. He enjoyed telling stories of his life during those times.

Paul met his wife, Nancy, who also worked for Senator Proxmire in Washington, in 1958. And then, in 1968, they moved their family to Wisconsin, where he continued to work on progressive causes and campaigns. There he worked as a caregiver and manager of group homes.

Paul and Nancy raised three children: Ann Fedders of New Richmond, Sidney Scott of Fall City, and Paul Barkla, Jr., of Ellsworth. He was very proud of his 12 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Paul believed in our democratic process and public service. That is why he ran for and was elected to the Pierce County Board in 2004 and later became the board chair.

Pierce County residents knew Paul as a community leader and advocate

for the needs of his neighbors. He wasn't afraid to tackle tough issues.

He told me he enjoyed serving on the county board because it was less partisan, driven more by the local needs of the Pierce County residents rather than strict adherence to party ideology.

Although Paul was gruff on the outside, he was fiercely loyal to his family and friends. We had many discussions over the years. I knew I could always count on Paul to provide an honest opinion, and he was never afraid to speak his mind.

He made many friends over the years through politics and public service. He befriended many of my staff whom he talked to frequently and stayed in touch with even when they moved on to other opportunities.

For those who are lucky enough to cross paths with Paul, from folks in Washington to Oregon to Washington, D.C., he will not be forgotten.

Paul exemplified what was great about America: deep love for his country, the importance of public service, and the need to fight for the most vulnerable and less fortunate in our society.

In short, Paul was a great patriot and a great American. For those whose lives he touched, Paul will be greatly missed.

HOLDING INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE ACCOUNTABLE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PERRY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PERRY. Madam Speaker, yesterday was tax day—or at least the deadline for filing and paying your taxes. I can't imagine very many citizens look forward to that.

We all know that we have to do our part, but we are often frustrated by the unacceptable waste of government spending. We all work hard; yet, they take our money and oftentimes spend it on things that we find objectionable or, worse, they simply waste it.

To add insult to injury, government doesn't have to follow the same standards that every citizen has to. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the IRS and its Commissioner, who scoffs at the very same rules that every other citizen has to abide by.

Now, I would just ask you: If you got subpoenaed to produce documents and to protect documents and just ignored it, how do you think that would go for you? If you lied to government officials—let's say government officials in the IRS—about your tax records, knowing that they are requirements, and you just refused to provide them, how do you think that that would be for you?

This is just another example of two sets of standards, one for the ruling class and another for the rest of the citizens. It was never intended to be this way, essentially where we are forced to serve our government.