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Does research into disease, ticks and malt liquor use stimulate the economy?

by Michelle Breidenbach / [The Post-Standard](#)

Sunday July 26, 2009, 7:53 AM



Stephen D. Cannerelli / The Post-Standard

In the Microscopy and Imaging Facility at Cornell University's Weill Hall, Ed Rice a technician in Biological and Environmental Engineering sets up at a cell sample to be looked at while Carol Bayles, Manager at the facility and research associate Nokyoung Park look on. This equipment is being replaced with a new microscope, paid for in part by \$500,000 in federal economic stimulus money.

U.S. taxpayers will pay \$162,000 for a study that sends college students into the wild to collect ticks and plant them on lab mice.

Another grant will pay \$25 each to 100 residents of the Pacific Island of Palau for scientists to draw samples of their blood.

Americans will pay \$783,000 for a study that invites 100 malt liquor and marijuana users in Buffalo to call in and punch numbers on the telephone to record their habits each day. Each will be paid at least \$45 for their time.

The studies are paid for by the \$787 billion economic recovery act, an unprecedented effort intended to jump-start the economy, make jobs and modernize the nation's infrastructure, energy independence and health care systems.

Academic researchers are pleased with the extra billions of dollars to make advances in understanding diseases, drugs and global warming. But the spending raises the question: Can two years of academic research make jobs and stimulate the economy?

The [National Institutes of Health](#), the country's top research agency, is awarding recovery money to projects proposed long before the recession. With \$8 billion extra dollars to spend on research, agency officials went back to the

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list of projects that had been turned down.

They looked for projects that could be done in two years, with no special emphasis on job creation and no requirement that the scientists buy equipment made in America.

[the expose, the state rescinded the sign requirement, saving as much as \\$900,000.](#)

Scientists whose ideas did not make the cut last year are answering surprise telephone calls from government officials, announcing the projects would be funded after all.

When President Barack Obama first talked about spending billions of stimulus dollars on health science research, Rick Ostfeld's tick study had been sitting on a shelf for two years at the [Cary Institute of Ecological Studies in Millbrook](#).

Ostfeld said he did not think of his own work when he first heard the president talk about recovery money for scientific research. Peer reviewers gave Ostfeld's proposal high marks, but it was not funded by President Bush's administration.

On June 1, Ostfeld escorted U.S. Rep. Scott Murphy through a tick-infested forest to show him how he would spend recovery money to study how global warming is affecting the tick population.

The study will be done both in Millbrook and at Syracuse's State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry. The grant will pay one researcher at each school to work during the summer and will allow them to hire three full-time students to help in the summer and two part-time students to work during the school year, he said.

"We had submitted this proposal well before there was any whispering of a stimulus package," he said. "We were the beneficiaries after the fact."

Jobs aren't a requirement

Last year, the NIH granted about \$24 billion to academic institutions and small businesses for research. Obama has proposed increasing that to \$30.1 billion next year.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will boost that spending by about \$4 billion a year for two years.

Sally Rockey, acting deputy director for extramural research at the NIH, said the agency did not choose projects based on the jobs they would create.

Most of the money would pay the salaries of technicians, students, post-doctorate students and investigators, she said. The agency intends to track the number of jobs created and retained, she said.

Colleges and universities are often the largest employers in cities the size of Syracuse, and communities will benefit from equipment purchases and construction projects, Rockey said. The agency also intends to grant about \$1 billion for construction, renovation and repair at these institutions.

"I think you have to think about the dual role of this package, which is not only to stimulate the economy and create jobs, but to advance science," she said.

The first NIH grant to Syracuse University is a \$70,000 award for a Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs professor to study the health consequences of teenage childbirth. A second-year award could bring the cost to \$130,000.

Leonard Lopoo, associate professor in Maxwell's Center for Policy Research, applied for the grant in summer 2008. He said Washington lawmakers need more information about how teen pregnancy affects mothers and babies. He will analyze data collected by the Texas Health Department to better understand how teen pregnancy affects the mother's education, her need for public assistance and the child's future needs.

The grant will pay a summer salary in addition to his annual nine-month salary from Syracuse University. It will allow him to hire one graduate student this summer. He will also use the money to buy computer equipment, he said.

Mental illness in Pacific

Four grants totaling about \$1 million have been awarded to SUNY Upstate Medical University. The studies involve heart disease, drug research, multiple sclerosis and schizophrenia.

Marina Myles-Worsley, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at SUNY Upstate Medical University, said the schizophrenia research began in 1989. She travels to [Palau, in the Pacific](#), to study the large number of cases that appear to run in families in the genetically isolated population of about 20,000 people.

The project has been continually funded by the NIH and a private foundation since 1995. The \$109,000 recovery act grant will allow researchers to analyze blood samples from 100 more people, she said.

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Each Palauan participant will be paid \$25. The chemicals, equipment and lab processing for genotyping cost \$475 per subject and come from a U.S. company, she said. The grant will also help pay part of the salaries of two Syracuse-based researchers who will analyze the DNA samples, she said.

R. Lorraine Collins, a professor of health behavior and associate dean for research at the school of public health and health professions at the University at Buffalo, SUNY, said she reduced her proposal from four years to two years to fit the requirements of the recovery spending.

She will receive slightly less than \$400,000 per year to study malt liquor and marijuana use. The study builds on previous research that showed that about half of the people who drink malt liquor were also regular marijuana smokers. She wants to know what is going on when people use the two together and separately.

About 100 participants will be asked to call in every day for three weeks and answer questions about whether they consumed alcohol or marijuana and whether they were alone or with friends or at a party or at home.

"Understanding those kinds of questions can have important implications for treatment," she said.

She will employ three full-time people for two years. The grant will also pay part of her salary.

At both SUNY schools, the researchers said they will not get salary increases. The federal grant is applied toward their salaries and the state-run universities can use the money saved for something else.

Foreign-made equipment

The largest grants to Cornell University so far will allow the school to buy about \$3 million in equipment -- an MRI scanner and two microscopes. The three grant proposals were on the waiting list at NIH.

Scientists are testing microscopes to decide which one to buy. They are all manufactured in Germany and Japan, said Rebecca Williams, a research scientist in biomedical engineering.

She said she thought the grant award for equipment seemed "a little weird" at first for a program intended to stimulate the economy. The \$500,000 grant will not create any jobs in the U.S.

"Here we are sending our money to Germany or Japan, whereas we're having some problems keeping staff right now," she said.

There's an American-made requirement on the steel used for stimulus road projects, but not for equipment bought with the research grants, said the NIH's Rockey.

"It's likely in the scientific world that a lot of equipment is not made in the United States," she said.

Bird-banding records

The National Science Foundation, the Army Corps of Engineers, the departments of defense, energy, interior and justice, and other agencies are also spending recovery money on research.

Many of these proposals also describe work that can be done quickly: replace equipment, manage data and make maps.

The Army Corps of Engineers' spending plan includes ship simulation modeling in Alaska, monitoring salmon habitat in the Puget Sound and making floodplain maps in Idaho and Montana.

The U.S. Geological Survey will spend \$140 million in recovery money, including \$15 million to update volcano monitoring equipment, \$29 million for earthquake equipment and \$488,000 to put online half a million paper records about bird banding.

The U.S. Department of Justice plans to award \$2 million in grants for field research that improves its ability to prosecute Internet crimes against children.

The National Institute of Mental Health is using recovery money to evaluate the effectiveness of a training program for telephone crisis counselors at suicide hotline centers. The first year of the two-year grant will cost about \$800,000.

Like all scientific research, the end result is information. It will be



John Halpern / Cary Institute

U.S. Rep. Scott Murphy (left), Dr. Richard S. Ostfeld, and Senior Research Specialist Kelly M. Oggentuss are on the grounds of the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies, Millbrook, NY, looking at blacklegged ticks.

disseminated to other scientists at meetings and conferences and in journal articles. If the results are useful, scientists will return to NIH for more money to finance the next step.

Transparent spending

The NIH is putting information about [each grant on its Web site](#).

Anyone can search projects by congressional district or institution, read the project description, find the grant amount and even the e-mail address for the lead researcher. There is a section called "results," where published journal articles and patents will be listed.

ARRA funding requires grant recipients to make more information transparent. Scientists have had their research ideas tested and accepted by their peers. Now, they have to vet their ideas before the taxpaying public.

The scientists interviewed for this story were enthusiastic about describing their proposals, but they were less interested in talking about specifics and money. They are used to keeping confidential information about their subjects and prefer not to let the public know, for example, how much they pay them or where they collect their ticks.

Lopoo was defensive about explaining how his grant to study teen pregnancy would stimulate the economy.

"When I applied for this, the idea wasn't that I was going to stimulate the economy," he said. "It was that I was going to do some research."

He said people should not compare the number of jobs created by science grants with the number of jobs created by hard-hat transportation projects because the goals of science are different.

"I don't make new roads. I don't make bridges," Lopoo said. "But I do improve our knowledge of a particular phenomenon and I think that can be just as valuable."

Michelle Breidenbach can be reached at mbreidenbach@syracuse.com and 470-3186.

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COMMENTS (50)

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Posted by **jonalvy** on 07/26/09 at 9:04AM

Come on, we've already spent \$79 billion in climate studies and our nation is going broke...

If universities want to do research, they have enough money to fund their own...

We need to be pro-active in taking a serious look at saving our economy and our country before it's too late...

Deficit spending must cease...

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Posted by **testyou** on 07/26/09 at 9:43AM

Movable Type

An error occurred

There was an error writing to the log file: Permission denied at /var/www/cgi-bin/mte/plugins/LogToDisk/LogToDisk.pl line 117.

Could some of that money go towards syracuse.com getting a real comments system? You know, maybe some real coders who don't use a freebie and could actually create their own...that works!!!

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Posted by **bkfrbeantwn** on 07/26/09 at 9:45AM

jonalvy, You are so right. One more example of why the stimulus was rushed through in such a hurry before anyone could read it before they voted. It blows me away that the NIH says that it did not even consider whether the grant creates real jobs.

Maybe we need a NIH czar.... NOT!!

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Posted by **slim1h2o** on [07/26/09 at 10:21AM](#)

I'm not sure why the American taxpayer has to underwrite all these expensive research projects. Anything that is learned, or realised with this research, and the taxpayer needs to access that info, whether it's medicine, or whatnot, we end up being charged out the whazoo for it.

But yet, we are the ones footin' the bill for it in the first place.

This country is way out of whack, and needs to get back.....to the old ways.

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Posted by **2muchtax** on [07/26/09 at 10:42AM](#)

Senator Chuckie "say-cheese" Schmuck loves his bacon and pork - govt. waste at its finest !!!
Maybe we need grant monies to feed the hungry in America NOT for a study that invites 100 malt liquor and marijuana users in Buffalo. Chuckie get YOUR priorities straight!!

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Posted by **leonidas3000** on [07/26/09 at 10:47AM](#)

yeah, you're right. let's just stop funding all university research. that way, jobs will be created out of thin air. nothing good comes out of navigating the realms of science... oh, except for technological, medicinal, agricultural, and other societal advancements. but hell, i'm game for putting my money into another McDonalds to stimulate the economy. nice article Michelle...

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Posted by **ihatesnow102** on [07/26/09 at 10:48AM](#)

Wow! This will make jobs won't it? I very surprised that the PS even reported it. The 2nd most left wing newspaper in the country. Notice there was no story on Obama, Gates and the cop? I would have loved to have seen the blog remarks on that one. It's getting very obvious who is in charge of the county and it's not Obama. Health care saving small business?, ya right. If you have a job in small business now I hope you have it next year. It doesn't look good.

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Posted by **PatriotYank** on [07/26/09 at 10:53AM](#)

I wonder if the govt gives money to those who disagree with their stance on global warming? It's easy to get people to fall in line with the govt's view with money as the payoff. The global warming theory is a scam. It is an attempt to force Cap and Trade down our throat to get more money by way of taxes.

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Posted by **gunglegym** on [07/26/09 at 11:08AM](#)

Advances in science are one of the few things that has kept America's economy running, even as manufacturing has been largely lost. Anyone who works in biotech, internet technologies, medicine, defense, energy, or agriculture (just to name a few) should recognize that their jobs would be very different, or nonexistent, had researchers not been working in universities trying to figure things out. These are anecdotes meant to stir up frustration. Would it be better to pour money into temporary projects, or think about the future? I am sure 20 years ago most people would have complained about funding research on how to communicate between computers...Hell, all the science research spending in this country is nothing compared to a single B2 bomber. How about we try thinking long term.

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Posted by **nuna** on [07/26/09 at 12:03PM](#)

wooho -

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Posted by **mhr59** on [07/26/09 at 12:05PM](#)

Americans at the political trough.

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Posted by **1020pond** on [07/26/09 at 12:39PM](#)

It's amazing that our Gov't can take our money and spend it on such trash and call it job stimulus. WE THE PEOPLE are in DESPERATE need of a Gov't that doesn't have it's head stuck up it's ASS!

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Posted by **ChairmanAl01** on [07/26/09 at 12:56PM](#)

Proctor, Dwayne C

5R21AA01353002 \$145,000 MEDICINE,
Psychiatry Evaluating industry codes governing malt liquor ads.

I demand to know the effects of Malt Liquor ads on society! NO PRICE IS TOO HIGH!

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Posted by **Joanne1977** on [07/26/09 at 1:05PM](#)

So the answer is NO. None of this will create jobs!

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Posted by **thekenyan** on [07/26/09 at 1:14PM](#)

chairman Al, while I do not consume the broth of the devil, I understand that sales of malt liquor are targeted to the black community. will the kenyan serve malt liquor instead of beer to professor gates and sgt crowley in the white house? Or will they refuse to share their malt liquor with sgt crowley, and instead serve him bud light??

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Posted by **ChairmanAl01** on [07/26/09 at 1:59PM](#)

thekenyan,

Most importantly, what are the long term psychological effects on inner-city social structure? Could predatory advertising by evil malt liquor companies be at the root of urban strife? Is the CIA somehow behind this? So many questions, and so much porkulus money...where to begin?

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Posted by **slim1h2o** on [07/26/09 at 2:07PM](#)

Al;

Begim by throwing bags of money out into the "hood", and watch the action.....

Noway man that's my money...

No it's mine, get away.....

And on and on and.....

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Posted by **slim1h2o** on [07/26/09 at 2:42PM](#)

test.....

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Posted by **eatomus** on [07/26/09 at 5:33PM](#)

Test?

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Posted by **slim1h2o** on [07/26/09 at 5:51PM](#)

Apparently Syracuse is moderating the site now.

The two posts prior was posted about 3 hrs after I posted originally.....lets see how long this gets posted....

I'm betting about 8:00

What a joke.....

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Posted by **ChairmanAl01** on [07/26/09 at 6:17PM](#)

slim,

Heck, throw bags of money anywhere, and watch the insanity. People everywhere love their money, and savage behavior is not just confined to "the hood" when a large sum of money is presented. (Just think of our fine representatives in Albany and D.C.)

Although, as our nation is in debt and supplementing our income with the "Bank of China" credit card, I don't think we're in a position to be throwing bags of money anywhere.

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Posted by **ChairmanAl01** on [07/26/09 at 6:27PM](#)

slim,

...but, one of the best displays of savage behavior I ever witnessed was during the L.A. Riots. On the second day, the rich folks of Manhattan Beach felt safe enough to make a run for it, and they all descended on the Mobil station across the street from me at the same time. Nothing like watching Biff, Chad, and Troy fighting to the death over a gas pump.

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Posted by **slim1h2o** on [07/26/09 at 6:51PM](#)

Al;

One thing for sure, this country has turned into a joke,....fer sure!

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Posted by **ChairmanAl01** on [07/26/09 at 7:24PM](#)

slim,

Well, I don't know about the whole country, but giving some guy \$145,000 to study malt liquor advertising sure seems like a joke; especially if the intended purpose of this money is to stimulate the economy and create jobs.

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Posted by **snapdog** on [07/26/09 at 7:36PM](#)

I think our elected leaders are studying a fair amount of malt liquor themselves as evidenced by the endless procession of dollars down one sink-hole after another. But hey- I got like \$6 from the big fat stimulus, so I guess I should be happy.

Oh by the way- Senator Schumer says that we voters don't care about pork spending.

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Posted by **slim1h2o** on [07/26/09 at 7:36PM](#)

Al:

And that there lies the joke.

Why do we have to fund all these studies, and research projects? Can we recoup these costs that costs us money? No!

And then when we need them (taxpayers) we get charged the premium price. Yet the world gets the discounted prices?

This country has/is pricing its self right out of existence....

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Posted by **VinnyBubotts** on [07/26/09 at 7:41PM](#)

Lets face it.... getting bit by a tick and pounding down some malt liquor would stimulate all of us right now...

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Posted by **VinnyBubotts** on [07/26/09 at 7:42PM](#)

Lets face it.... getting bit by a tick and pounding down some malt liquor would stimulate all of us right now...

Is this number two?

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Posted by **ChairmanAl01** on [07/26/09 at 7:55PM](#)

snapdog,

Ah, yes, the "chattering class"... I wonder if the chattering class will make the good senator pay for that little display of elitism when his term is up? I hope his opponent beats him without mercy with that video clip, because the thought of six more years of him makes me want to hurl.

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Posted by **callerrudy** on [07/26/09 at 8:02PM](#)

Malt liquor and blunts going to stimulate the economy?!?...why dont thay call it what it is...reparations!!!!!!

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Posted by **myrbch433** on [07/26/09 at 8:31PM](#)

ChairmanAl01,

You need not worry about nausea, if we can only remind the masses to remove the current garbage from office, and elect some new faces to Albany.

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Posted by **bossjones1** on [07/26/09 at 8:36PM](#)

Nice job picking apart a straw man Michelle, this article is weak, especially from a quality reporter.

You did not put this story in any sort of perspective.

The fact is the previous administration did not fund science, this resulted in a large number of job losses over the past 6 years or so (some people left science, some went private sector). Now the money is being restored in a short two year burst via the stimulus which just started making its way into the lab about a week ago so of course hiring has not occurred yet and may not unless funding is provided for a longer period of time as 6 years of no money have left labs with aged equipment and desperately low on basic supplies.

Regardless this money will go to providing the researchers that are already employed money to do more and better research and make more progress on their projects...therefore it will go towards reagents and supplies which mostly come from American companies some of them local, Invitrogen, Fisher, Corning, Krackeler, LPS (rochester), Kodak, etc etc.

Regardless the most important thing this money does is provide money to train graduate students who make up the next generation in science and is the only thing keeping us number one on the global stage.

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Posted by **ChairmanAl01** on [07/26/09 at 8:38PM](#)

myrbch433,

Yes, this does call for some fresh faces, but just in case the sheeple come down with their usual case of amnesia, I'm stocking up on Pepto-Bismol.

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Posted by **smash3601** on [07/26/09 at 9:01PM](#)

bossjones1,

Nice attempt at trying to kick the Bush Administration under the bus but if you look at the FACTS and not the liberal media you will see that the NIH funding was \$28.4 Billion dollars for FY 06, and the NIH Director Dr. Elias A. Zerhouni, did NOT request additional funding for the following fiscal year when he testified before Congress. The Bush Administration spent ALOT of money on Science/Medicine/Research.

nih.gov/about/director/budgetrequest/fy2007directorsbudgetrequest.htm

""Its not that our liberal friends are ignorant, it's that they know so much that isn't true."---Ronald Reagan

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Posted by **crazedmaniac** on [07/26/09 at 9:18PM](#)

So much money....

So little justification....

But totally stimulating!

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Posted by **teakchic** on [07/26/09 at 9:34PM](#)

Protecting the one eyed frog is not going to stimulate the economy. Sending someone into the brush in Australia to look for a cure for the common cold is not going to stimulate the economy. You know what will stimulate the economy? The TAXPAYERS If the friggen government would get their heads out of their arsus for just one minute and give every person that files a tax return this so called stimulus money, the economy would be cleaned up in a matter of weeks if not days. People would buy cars, putting car companies back in production, buy homes, putting tradesmen back to work, go shopping, something many haven't been able to do since this whole recession began and finally pay off or pay down credit card debt. The taxpayer citizens of this country are the ones who need to stimulate the economy, not some research lab. Someone in Washington has to start thinking outside the box if our economy is ever going to recover.

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Posted by **teakchic** on [07/26/09 at 9:35PM](#)

Protecting the one eyed frog is not going to stimulate the economy. Sending someone into the brush in Australia to look for a cure for the common cold is not going to stimulate the economy. You know what will stimulate the economy? The TAXPAYERS If the friggen government would get their heads out of their arsus for just one minute and give every person that files a tax return this so called stimulus money, the economy would be cleaned up in a matter of weeks if not days. People would buy cars, putting car companies back in production, buy homes, putting tradesmen back to work, go shopping, something many haven't been able to do since this whole recession began and finally pay off or pay down credit card debt. The taxpayer citizens of this country are the ones who need to stimulate the economy, not some research lab. Someone in Washington has to start thinking outside the box if our economy is ever going to recover.

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Posted by **iwasloader** on [07/26/09 at 9:50PM](#)

foolish headline - do they think they work for free?

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Posted by **ChabieD** on [07/26/09 at 11:38PM](#)

It's a shame that purchases were halted on the F-22 Raptor and this kind of wasteful spending continues.

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Posted by **19Micron51** on [07/27/09 at 5:57AM](#)

This is more proof that Obama is just another cheap crooked, con artist from the Chicago political machine. He continues to buy votes with money from working people's wallets! Obama wants to control everything, & make sure your money is used wisely from his perspective! This impersonator needs to be impeached for what he has done to the US taxpayer! What a punk, he would not even answer a question whether he & his family would be included in health care disaster he is planning! He has the premo plan we taxpayers give him, what a crock of SH!%!

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Posted by **jfnorth** on [07/27/09 at 10:39AM](#)

Oh why not, there is already enough of our tax payer dollars going into useless studies at colleges anyhow. How about the stimulus \$ that went into "packaged ham"!, street lights in Vagas,Harry Reeds hometown park,etc. etc...

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Posted by **ChabieD** on [07/27/09 at 10:40AM](#)

You might say that Obama has blinded us with science.

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Posted by **OrangeReb** on [07/27/09 at 12:30PM](#)

One can certainly question the merits of individual studies - a recent one that determined that condom usage was not increasing because it didn't feel as good comes to mind.

But these studies most certainly stimulate the economy. One of the reasons several universities recently built life sciences buildings is because of the amount of money the government is using to fund research in those areas.

You can't tell me that \$100+ million buildings don't stimulate the economy.

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Posted by **smash3601** on [07/27/09 at 1:19PM](#)

""Memo:

As the CEO of this organization, I have resigned myself to the fact that Barrack Obama is our President and that our taxes and government fees will increase in a BIG way. To compensate for these increases, our prices would have to increase by about 10%.

But since we cannot increase our prices right now due to the dismal state of the economy, we will have to lay off sixty of our employees instead. This has really been bothering me, since I believe we are family here and I didn't know how to choose who would have to go.

So, this is what I did.. I walked through our parking lots and found sixty 'Obama' bumper stickers on our employees' cars and have decided these folks will be the ones to let go. I can't think of a more fair way to approach this problem. They voted for change, I gave it to them.

I will see the rest of you at the annual company picnic""

How's that HOPE/CHANGE thing working out for you DEMS??!!

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Posted by **ChabieD** on [07/27/09 at 1:31PM](#)

Thanks for the copy and paste smash3601, I don't get enough of these from my Gramma.

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Posted by **littlebigsho** on [07/27/09 at 2:26PM](#)

there is a lot of money in malt liquor and weed...this study will pay for itself over and over again...we are lucky to have such a responsible government

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Posted by **freak247** on [07/28/09 at 6:50AM](#)

\$783,000 for a study that invites 100 malt liquor

I did my own study.... Malt Liquor = Stabbings, shootings, playground burnings, pigs for crack sales, food stamps for 50 cents on the dollar, and candle light vigils. So where is my \$783,000????

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