

WHAT THEY DON'T WANT YOU ADDING UP

The Fiscal Reality

Facing America

Most Americans have never seen these numbers presented in one place. Once you do, you cannot unsee them.

By John D. McKearn

Your government wants you focused on the argument they're having today — the culture war, the scandal, the outrage of the week. They very much do not want you looking at these numbers. So let's look at them.

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|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>\$38.9T Total national debt</p> | <p>\$2–3T Added every year in new deficits</p> |
| <p>~\$1T Annual interest — buys nothing</p> | <p>\$160T+ Total obligations including Social Security & Medicare</p> |

Sources: U.S. Treasury · Congressional Budget Office · Truth in Accounting

THE DEBT

\$38.9 Trillion and Climbing

The total national debt has reached **\$38.9 trillion**. That number is so large it has lost all meaning for most people. So let's make it personal.

There are roughly 130 million households in America. That means your family's share of the national debt — money already spent, already owed, already gone — is approximately

\$300,000.

Not your mortgage. Not your car payment. Your share of what politicians spent without asking you.

Source: U.S. Treasury

THE DEFICIT

\$2–3 Trillion Every Single Year

The government is not simply sitting on that \$38.9 trillion and managing it responsibly. It is **adding \$2 to \$3 trillion to it every year** — and projections show no sign of that stopping.

This is not a war footing. This is not an emergency. This is a Tuesday. This is simply what the United States government spends beyond what it takes in, year after year after year, as a matter of routine policy.

Source: Congressional Budget Office

THE INTEREST

Nearly \$1 Trillion Per Year — for Nothing

Here is where it starts to become genuinely frightening.

The interest payments on the debt we have already accumulated are approaching **\$1 trillion per year**. That is roughly **\$150 billion more than the entire defense budget** — and it buys you absolutely nothing. No roads. No schools. No military. No services of any kind. It is simply the cost of having borrowed so much for so long.

As the debt grows, so does the interest. This is a spiral with no natural floor.

Source: Congressional Budget Office

THE HIDDEN NUMBER

\$160 Trillion in Promises

The \$38.9 trillion figure — staggering as it is — is actually the optimistic number.

When you include the long-term commitments the government has already made through Social Security and Medicare — money promised to people who have paid into these systems their entire working lives — the true estimated federal obligation rises to more than **\$160 trillion** beyond the current debt.

That is not a projection of future spending. That is money already promised. Already owed. To people who are counting on it.

Source: Truth in Accounting

YOUR STATE AND CITY

Probably Worse Than You Think

The federal picture is grim enough. But it doesn't stop there.

Pension systems for state and local government employees across the country are massively underfunded — and that's using the optimistic assumptions the funds themselves choose. Using realistic projections, the holes are far deeper.

New York City has already begun raiding its teachers' pension fund to help cover its operating deficits. A city so broke it is taking money set aside for the retirement of its teachers to pay its day-to-day bills.

Your city. Your state. Probably doing some version of the same thing.

Sources: Equable Institute, Reason Foundation

FEDERAL PENSIONS

Trillions More in Promises That Cannot Be Kept

On top of all of this, federal civilian and military retirement systems carry promised benefits worth trillions more — commitments that could not possibly be honored if the government's fiscal position continues to deteriorate.

These are promises made to real people — soldiers, veterans, federal workers — who served and planned their entire lives around them.

Source: Federal actuarial reports

THE RECORD

Should We Trust Politicians to Fix This?

Let's consult the record.

Congress has not managed to pass a complete, on-time federal budget in all but **4 of the last 29 years**. They have not even agreed on a basic budget framework — called a concurrent budget resolution — in roughly **15 years**.

These are not people working hard on the problem and falling slightly short. These are people who have abandoned the most basic responsibility of fiscal governance entirely — while continuing to spend, borrow, promise, and spend some more.

The one thing politicians of both parties have proven consistently, across decades, is an absolute mastery of a single skill: **spending money that doesn't exist, ignoring the consequences, and making sure you're looking somewhere else when the bill comes due.**

4 of 29

The number of years in the last 29 that Congress passed all appropriations bills on time.

Source: Congressional Research Service

THE ANSWER

No. Not Even a Little.

Not because politicians are uniquely evil people. But because the system rewards spending and punishes honesty. Every dollar spent buys a vote or a donor. Every honest conversation about fiscal reality costs them one. The incentives are perfectly designed to produce exactly what we have: a \$38.9 trillion debt, \$160 trillion in unfunded promises, and a political class that would rather manufacture an outrage than read a balance sheet.

The first step is the one you just took: **knowing the numbers.**

Share this with someone who needs to see them.

"The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie — deliberate, contrived and dishonest — but the myth — persistent, persuasive and unrealistic."

— John F. Kennedy

Sources: U.S. Treasury · Congressional Budget Office · Truth in Accounting · Equable Institute · Reason Foundation · Federal actuarial reports · Congressional Research Service