

- Mark your confusion.
- Purposefully annotate the article (1-2 mature, thoughtful responses per page to what the author is saying)
- Write a 250+ word response to the article.

## **America's 'everything' fighter jet is a total disaster** by Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry for *The Week*, 1/18/2016

The F-35 is an absolute disaster, and it needs to go. The scandals around it are legion.

The supersonic stealth plane called the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter was supposed to be the greatest and best military plane the world has ever seen. While the United States' stealthy F-22 is an "air superiority" plane, ensuring the country's dominance over the skies, which is why exporting it is illegal, the F-35 was supposed to be able to do everything, and be the standard fighter-bomber of the U.S. and most countries with which the U.S. has friendly relations. It was supposed to be stealthy, to be able take off and land vertically, and to know everything about everything thanks to its amazing software and sensors. It can't do any of those things so far.

The program has cost \$1.3 trillion so far. By comparison, the Apollo Program, which actually sent people to the moon, cost about \$170 billion in 2005 dollars. The F-35 is literally the most expensive military project in history. By 2014, the program was \$163 billion over budget, and seven years behind schedule.

From the beginning the F-35 was practically designed to be a horrendous boondoggle. First, there was the idea to make just one plane that would fit every service branch's needs. The Marines wanted a vertical takeoff and landing plane that could bomb things on the ground. The Navy wanted a carrier-borne plane. The Air Force wanted a plane that could shoot other planes.

The original "Joint Strike Fighter" program, from which the F-35 grew, started out in the early 1990s. The goal was to replace most of the country's Cold War era fighters and bombers, including the F-16, the F-18, the A-10, and the AV-8B. The problem with this approach is that it lead to design by committee and design by wishlists. It turned out that trying to make a plane to do everything meant that it did everything poorly.

The project has suffered endless delays and cost overruns, and, still, the thing is half-baked. The latest problem is that the plane's software — absolutely essential for a 21st century plane — doesn't work. Former RAND author John Stillion has written that the F-35 "can't turn, can't climb, can't run." It's heavy, bulky, and doesn't carry that many weapons. It even has safety issues.

Every time the F-35 project it goes beyond schedule, every time it costs more than anticipated, every time something doesn't work, Americans are told it's just a bug, it's just a minor problem. Enough is enough.

There's a well-known trick by defense contractors to make sure a project is never killed and becomes a goose that lays golden eggs: spread the production of the thing over as many congressional districts as possible. But this time, the program took this old trick global. It's even better if you put as many countries in on the action as possible, because if by any chance one government balks, the others will carry it on. Lockheed Martin, which makes the F-35, is expertly practiced in the art of milking the U.S. government for cash.

It's time to end it. The only reason left not to do it is sunk costs — which is exactly the reason why it should be ended. Sunk costs are gone. Many defense experts agree that an air force would be better off using current F-16s and F-18s than the fantastically expensive F-35. U.S. defense specialist Winslow T. Wheeler and aircraft designer Pierre Sprey have written that given the F-35's astronomical costs and design flaws, any air force would be better off maintaining its fleets of F-16s and F/A-18s.

What about the United States' vaunted air dominance, and the need to have super 21st century planes because of China? Well, we might have had that plane, but we don't. The best incentive for defense contractors to produce good products is to show that Washington has the political will to shoot down a \$1.3 trillion program in mid-air when it doesn't work.

Does Washington have that political will?

**Possible response options:**

- What do you think? Should Washington end the F-35 program? Explain your reasoning in light of evidence from the author's argument.
  - Do you predict that Congress will end this project? Why or why not?
  - Choose any passage and respond to it.
- 

**Also, in case you were wondering...**

**What Would \$1 Trillion Would Buy** by Kevin McCormally for *Kiplinger*, 1/28/2011

**41,999,160 NEW CARS**

The 2011 Toyota Prius II wins Kiplinger's Best in Class honors for cars in the \$20,000-to-\$25,000 price range. At a sticker price of \$23,810 each, \$1 trillion would let you buy a Prius for about 40% of all American families.

**5.6 MILLION TYPICAL AMERICAN HOMES**

According to the latest figures from the National Association of Realtors, the national median price for existing single-family homes in the third quarter of 2010 was \$177,900. There are about 80 million detached, single-family homes in the U.S., according to the NAR and the Census Bureau.

**140 BILLION HOURS OF LABOR**

That's calculated at the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour. Still hard to get your mind around? How about this: One trillion dollars is enough to hire all 2.8 million residents of the state of Kansas -- men, women and children -- in full-time, minimum-wage jobs for the next 23 years.

**A YEAR'S SALARY FOR 18 MILLION TEACHERS**

Teacher salary in the U.S. is about \$55,300. NEA estimates that there are about 2 million elementary school teachers, so \$1 trillion would cover their salaries for about 9 years.

**CONGRESS FOR THE NEXT 10,742 YEARS**

The current salary for rank-and-file members of the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate is \$174,000. That's 535 lawmakers -- not counting their staffs or the extras paid to congressional leaders.

**THE STAR POWER OF LEBRON JAMES FOR THE NEXT 50,000 YEARS**

A lot of numbers are being thrown around about just how much the basketball superstar will be paid for playing for the Miami Heat. But let's say it's just \$20 million a year. At that rate, \$1 trillion would cover the tab for King James for the next 50 millennia. Heck, King Tut was born less than four millennia ago.

**56.8 MILLION U.S. ARMY PRIVATES**

Annual basic pay for an active-duty U.S. Army private with less than two years of experience is \$17,611 a year. So \$1 trillion goes a mighty long way, even by military spending standards. To put that in perspective, 56.8 million is more than 100 times the total number of active-duty soldiers in the Army today.

**19.2 MILLION AMERICAN FAMILIES**

Median household income in the U.S. (half the families earn more, half earn less) was \$52,029 in 2008, according to the Bureau of the Census. There are about 100 million families in the country, so \$1 trillion is enough to cover the income of about one-in-five families.

**\$1 MILLION SPENDING A DAY FOR NEARLY 3,000 YEARS**

Thanks to the visitor who pointed this out in a comment on an earlier version of this story. What's \$1 trillion mean to you?