

The Pentagon Hunts for UFOs. Can You Guess How Much It Costs?

Last December, *The New York Times* broke the story about a [secret Pentagon program](#) that searches for UFOs. The Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program was a pet project of Harry Reid, the Nevada Democrat and then-Senate majority leader. The program ran from 2007 to 2012 and cost \$22 million.

It was funded by “black money,” the term used for classified Pentagon programs. This explains why the project wasn’t public until this year, because a public debate on the Senate floor wasn’t required in order to fund it. This story sounds less like reality and more like an episode of *The X-Files* – the iconic 90s series which is currently airing its 11th and final season.

The Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program gave most of the money to Reid’s billionaire friend Robert Bigelow, who runs an aerospace research company that has worked with NASA. Since Bigelow was already a billionaire, the obvious question is: why couldn’t he fund his own program?

Government Has a Long-Running Love Affair with UFO Hunting

The relationship between UFO searching and the US government is not new. It started in 1948 with a program by the United States Air Force called [Project Sign](#), then it changed its name to Project Grudge. Then, in 1953, it became [Project Blue Book](#) for two decades. The program had two goals: to determine if UFOs were a threat to national security and to scientifically

analyze UFO-related data.

In 1968, the [Condon Report](#) was published by the University of Colorado UFO Project, a group funded by the United States Air Force from 1966 to 1968, with the objective of studying unidentified flying objects under the direction of physicist Edward Condon. This was the result of researching the UFO files of Project Blue Book and from the civilian UFO groups and investigating sightings reported during the life of the Project.

The [conclusions](#) of the *Cordon Report* were that UFOs are not a threat to national security, that unidentified sightings didn't represent technological developments or principles beyond the range of modern science, and that there is no way to determine if UFOs are of extraterrestrial origin.

In 1970, Project Blue Book came to an end, but that didn't mean the government stopped funding the search for aliens. The SETI Institute, a non-profit organization founded in 1984, received funding from the government, but it stopped after its [criticism](#) as a waste of money without any relevant objective by two Democratic Senators, William Proxmire of Wisconsin and Richard Bryan of Nevada. But this was just the direct funding, because it still received money from governmental institutions like [NASA](#) in the form of research grants.

Someone could argue that \$22 million for a program is not that much money. That being said, as Bryan put it when shutting down the budget of the SETI Institute: "This hopefully will be the end of Martian hunting season at the taxpayers' expense." But it wasn't.

Do We Really Want Government Doing This?

The American government has wasted money on silly things like [birdwatching](#), [changing the sand](#) in beaches, and funding a [clown school](#) in Argentina. However, the real clowns are the politicians who love to empty the pockets of the taxpayers. UFO searches sound like a more imaginative way to waste money, but it's still not a legitimate government function.

Besides, could we trust that if a government actually solves the UFO mystery, they would reveal it? It seems doubtful, given their love for [secrecy](#). Plus, if UFOs really are of extraterrestrial origin, would we want to have politicians being the first to speak with an alien race?

Aliens are going to have a bad first impression of us if the first humans they meet are government bureaucrats. Plus, politicians tend to be [hawkish](#), so if they are first to contact an extraterrestrial civilization, the risk of war increases. Searching for UFOs is just not the government's business. We all would be better off if we leave that task to the private sector.

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