

Can You Visualize \$20 Trillion?

As of this writing, the U.S. government is \$19,898,916,000 in debt—and it's growing—which is why colloquially, we say the government is \$20 trillion in debt.

But just how much money is that, really?

For most Americans, \$1 million is difficult to fathom, but we're talking about 20 million times \$1 million. The average household income in the U.S. is roughly \$52,000 (rounding to the nearest thousand dollars to make the math a little easier) per year.

If you spent that much money every day, it would take 52,650 years, 11 months and 23 days to spend \$20 trillion. If you ramped up the spending to hourly, it would take nearly 2,361 years; if you spent that much every minute, 40 years.

The \$100 bill is typically the largest paper currency used to conduct a transaction, and \$1 million worth will fit in an average briefcase. But \$100 million is an impressive sight: \$100 bills stacked about waist high on a standard wooden pallet.

It would take 200,000 of those pallets to make \$20 trillion.

Let's look at it one last way. That same \$100 bill is exactly inches in length. So, if you placed them end-to-end, you get 10, per mile. You would have to go 1,938,131,313 miles, 693 feet, 4 inches to place \$20 trillion worth of \$100 bills end-to-end.

That's slightly more than 77,833 trips around the Earth at the equator, or slightly less than 4,057 trips to the Moon and back. billion miles is equivalent to 28 trips to Mars and

back.

Now that we've established just how enormous \$20 trillion is, though, an honest discussion of our nation's crushing debt problem should also address the problem with "unfunded liabilities." That is, future debt that is not covered by the value of our government's assets and bonding capacity, fueled mainly by so-called "entitlements," such as Social Security and Medicare, as well as employee and veterans' pensions and disability payments.

As of this writing, using generally accepted accounting principles, the nation's unfunded liabilities are \$106,020,550,000,000—or nearly five and a half times our current debt. Now, if that bit of news just sent you "to the moon," keep going.

You've got 10,273,848,490 miles to go.