

COMMITTEE ON
**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY**
CHAIRMAN LAMAR SMITH



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Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)
Investigating Contract Misconduct at the National Weather Service

Chairman Smith: Today we will hear about the Department of Commerce Inspector General's (IG) recent report on alleged contracting misconduct and improper influence at the National Weather Service. The Committee on Science, Space, and Technology has primary jurisdiction of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Weather Service (NWS).

Accurate and timely forecasts help keep Americans safe from extreme weather events. But this vital work is undermined and taxpayer money is wasted when senior officials at the NWS, NOAA, and the Department of Commerce are apparently complicit in granting improper contracts.

Today's hearing is an opportunity to hear from Mr. Donald Jiron, the former Deputy Chief Financial Officer at the National Weather Service and Mr. Robert Byrd, the former Chief Financial Officer at the National Weather Service.

These two individuals have the opportunity today to truthfully tell us why taxpayers picked up the tab for an allegedly improper contract worth nearly half a million dollars.

There is something fundamentally wrong with a system that allows a government employee to draft their own post-retirement contract, which increases their salary and pays for their housing while being funded by the American taxpayers. As a further insult to taxpayers, the National Weather Service hired a replacement for Mr. Jiron who ended up duplicating the work Mr. Jiron was doing as a contractor.

So after paying Mr. Jiron more money each month as a contractor and also paying a new Deputy CFO, American taxpayers essentially paid three times as much for the work formerly done by one person. Somehow, the National Weather Service was not aware of this issue until Mr. Jiron allegedly bribed a government employee to get a family member a job, which led the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to open an investigation.

Although there is no legal issue in the vast majority of cases that involve federal employees who return to work as contractors, I am concerned that this type of inappropriate revolving door problem might be common at NWS.

Mr. Jiron and Mr. Byrd were invited here today to explain what happened. Unfortunately, both former senior officials chose non-cooperation over being forthright.

Both refused to speak with Committee staff voluntarily and only appeared here today after the Committee had no alternative but to issue a subpoena. I still hope that Mr. Jiron and Mr. Byrd will take the opportunity today to address the charges made in the IG's report.

One of the most important functions of Congress is to conduct robust oversight of the Executive branch. This provides the fundamental checks and balances that our founders intended. When Americans' trust has been violated, Congress has an obligation to understand what went wrong so we can ensure that it does not happen again.

I was disappointed to learn that despite the OIG's good work highlighting this case, the Obama Administration's Justice Department (DOJ) refused to investigate this case. In fact, the DOJ rejected the IG's recommendations to investigate.

I look forward to hearing from all three witnesses this morning to shed light on these allegations and regain the Americans' trust.

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