

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



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Statement of Oversight Subcommittee Chairman Barry Loudermilk (R-Ga.)
Is NSF Properly Managing Its Rotating Staff?

Chairman Loudermilk: I would like to thank our witnesses for being here this morning. I am looking forward to hearing from you both on this very important matter.

We are here today to discuss the National Science Foundation's (NSF) use of the "rotator" program, specifically, the individuals who are assigned through the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPAs). These IPAs are top scientists, engineers, and educators from universities and industry who help staff the NSF on a temporary basis. In addition, the NSF employs Visiting Scientists, Engineers, and Educators (VSEEs), which together with the IPAs form the NSF "rotator" program.

While the "rotator" program brings expertise, diverse skill sets, and fresh perspectives to the NSF, IPAs come with a significant cost to the NSF, which is completely unacceptable. For example, these IPAs remain an employee of their home institution and their salaries are matched by the NSF throughout their tenure as an IPA, typically ranging from one to three years. In addition to salary matching, the NSF pays IPAs lost consulting fees, individual research and development travel, fringe benefits, and temporary living expenses.

Considering that NSF employs 184 IPAs, which is 12% of the total NSF workforce, these costs add up very quickly. In fact, according to a 2013 NSF Inspector General report, IPAs cost the NSF \$36,448 more per IPA on average than the average permanent federal employee, and in 2013, the NSF spent more than \$6.7 million on IPA-related costs.

When an agency is spending millions on rotating staff – not permanent staff – one would hope that they are the best suited individuals for the positions they are filling. However, that doesn't appear to be the case with the NSF. In 2010, an NSF IG report found that IPAs in management-level positions at the NSF lacked institutional knowledge about federal employment protocol, training, and expectations – all key management issues and functions.

The NSF funds a variety of large research projects, including multi-user research facilities, tools for research and education, and distributed instrumentation networks. Taking into account that some of these IPAs come from organizations and institutions that would be interested in some of these funds, there is also the chance that if not properly managed, an IPA could have a conflict of interest with certain proposals and awards. The NSF IG recently released a report detailing a situation that falls into this category, which I am looking forward to learning more about today.

As a small business owner, I unconditionally understand the need for accountability. The fact that these temporary staffers are being paid more money for jobs that they are not necessarily qualified for and have an inherent ability to take advantage of, is completely inexcusable. Without proper oversight, the

NSF is wasting taxpayer dollars on individuals who make more money than they should for jobs they may not be qualified for in roles that are susceptible to conflicts of interest. This Committee has warned the NSF about irresponsible spending over the past few years, and this is just another unfortunate example. When will the NSF take adequate measures to implement proper oversight, management, and plain responsibility?

I look forward to today's hearing, which I anticipate will inform us more about IPAs at the NSF – the management of them as well as the oversight and accountability of what they are being paid. We owe it to the American people to ensure that these assignments are not using hard-earned taxpayer money to overpay for sub-par work. How does that seem fair? In the end, though, I hope that this hearing will bring to light the issue of rotating staff and inform us on how to provide better oversight and management of federally-funded rotating staff to guarantee taxpayers that they can trust us with their money and know that it will be spent in the most efficient way.

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