



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on May 12, 2016

Gov't Waste Report Highlights Absurd Taxpayer-Funded Studies

A report released by Senator Jeff Flake (R) of Arizona reveals exorbitant examples of government waste. The report, entitled "Twenty Questions: Government Studies that will leave you scratching your head," focuses on taxpayer-funded studies funded by grants totalling \$35 million that are simply absurd.

Flake begins the report by explaining that the specific dollar amounts allotted to each study were not available. The studies listed in the report "were conducted as parts of more extensive research funded with government grants of financial support," and therefore, the costs provided represent the total amount of money in grants from which the study was financed, not necessarily the total cost of the study itself. Flake adds, "This is not intended to imply or suggest other research supported by these grants was wasteful, unnecessary or without merit."



Still, there can be very little justification for the studies Flake highlights in this report, as any expenditure for these studies would be considered outlandish by most people.

One such study analyzed the pain of a bee sting on multiple body parts. That study, part of a \$1 million grant to Cornell University, featured research Michael Smith, who withstood 200 bee stings on 25 body parts in order to determine the extent of pain. The results were that it hurt more to be stung on the penis than on the scrotum or nipple, but that being stung on the upper lip or the nostril provoked more pain than being stung on the penis.

"Stings to the nostril were especially violent, immediately inducing sneezing, tears and a copious flow of mucus," according to Smith. "By the time I got round to the third round, I thought: I really don't want to do my nose again."

Another study, which received funding from a \$390,000 National Science Foundation grant, used fur-particle tracking and high-speed videography to analyze the shakes of 33 wet animals. The study sought to learn how many shakes it takes wet animals from 16 species and five dog breeds to become dry.

"In this study, we investigate a mechanism used by mammals to dry quickly," the researchers write, referring to the motion as "the wet-dog shake." The shakes "were prompted by sprinkling small animals with a spray bottle, and large animals with a hose. We found animals generally shook after the flow of water had ceased," the authors explain.



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Ultimately, they learned that “reciprocal high-speed twisting commonly observed in dogs has a broad generality among mammals.”

The researchers claim “understanding the physics of the wet dog shake could help engineers recreate the optimal oscillation frequency and use it to improve the efficiency of washing machines, dryers, painting devices, spin coaters and other machines.”

A portion of a \$3.9 million grant for the National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health funded a study that asked, “What makes goldfish feel sexy?”

That study entailed surgically attaching male goldfish with a cap that links directly to their brains to allow for analysis of brain chemicals during certain social behaviors. The goldfish were then injected with sex steroids and placed in tanks with other male goldfish and female goldfish.

What did they learn? The male goldfish swam closer to the female goldfish when injected with steroids than when they were not infused with steroids.

“We see changes in sexual behavior within 10 to 20 minutes,” notes one of the researchers, Richmond Thompson. “We’re trying to figure out how that happens in the brain so quickly. They use visual cues to make sexual decisions and steroids seems [sic] to be affecting this process.”

Thompson also pondered whether the steroids are having any effect whatsoever on the sexual attraction of the goldfish, or whether the steroids were simply “just whacking the fish out.”

Some of the studies featured in Sen. Flake’s report funded from larger grants include: “Are cheerleaders more attractive in a squad?” (\$1.1 million); “What type of music do monkeys and chimps like?” (\$13 million); “Could you outrun a dinosaur?” (\$1.9 million); and “Who will be America’s Next Top Model?” (\$2.9 million).

In response to the findings, Sen. Flake said that the studies reveal mismanagement of taxpayer funds that should have been spent on worthier expenditures. “When federal agencies don’t spend our limited research dollars wisely, they’re not just wasting money, they’re missing opportunities, and we can’t afford either,” he said in a statement.

Of course, all federal expenditures should be restricted to carrying out the constitutional powers of the federal government. But doing so would eliminate not only wasteful spending along the lines of what Flake is pointing to in his study, but spending for scientific or other programs that may be worthwhile but should not be funded by the federal government.

Flake’s report calls for increased transparency in how taxpayer dollars are being spent:

Despite being published in journals or presented at conferences and scientific meetings, many taxpayer funded studies remain unavailable to the public. Furthermore, the abstracts of the research grants listed in agency databases are often times vague. Including the text of findings either published in journals or presented at conferences and meetings along with the costs of the studies in the databases is essential for taxpayers to understand how federal research dollars are being spent to advance science.

In addition to producing this report, Flake has introduced a bill that would prohibit the use of taxpayer dollars on such frivolous studies.

“We ought to reevaluate a system that spends federal funds looking for America’s next top model over a cure for cancer,” Flake said.



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But despite Flake's best intentions, the simplest way to eliminate this sort of wasteful funding is to look to the Constitution, where there exists no clause that allows for federal expenditures on health research outside the scope of preparing a military defense of the country's citizens.

Those who want certain research to be done can always fund the research through their own voluntary contributions to the entities that are doing or raising the money for the research.

Admittedly, if scientific research were privately funded, we may never know what drives goldfish libidos or how long it takes wet animals to dry. But is that a bad thing?



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