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By Theresa Defino

◆ **“There should be no conflict between rigorous integrity oversight and international collaborations,” in the words of Michael Lauer, NIH deputy director for extramural research. “This is a false dichotomy.”** Lauer, writing in his *Open Mike* blog, was drawing attention to a recent letter he coauthored and published in *Science* as a response to a March 23 article that, in Lauer’s view, “insinuates that the cases were mishandled and unjustified, but the data [shared] show that NIH had well-founded concerns.” In the May 25 blog post, Lauer highlighted that the agency was focused on “foreign interference concerns” as far back as May 2016, “long before the Department of Justice launched its entirely separate ‘China Initiative.’ We understand concerns about racial, ethnic, or political targeting. The disproportionate number of cases (which altogether account for < 1% of all NIH-funded principal investigators) linked to China likely stem from the extensive reach of Chinese talent recruitment programs, which explicitly target ethnic Chinese scientists.”

In addition to writing the *Science* letter, Lauer held two meetings with H. Holden Thorp, editor-in-chief of *Science* journals, one of which was published as an on-the-record interview. In Thorp’s own blog piece, he said NIH’s actions show “how the goals of scientists and politicians can result in conflict. Lauer’s program has had bipartisan support in Congress, and many Americans outside the scientific community might see Lauer as doing important work to protect American interests. But the scientific community correctly sees the value of collaboration and support for scientists of all nationalities,” Thorpe wrote. “The secrecy from the NIH up to this point has exacerbated this disconnect. In talking more openly and publishing their letter, the NIH is beginning to recognize the problem. Let’s hope that continues.” (6/15/23)

◆ **All four orders reviewed by the HHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) for purchases of information technology (IT) by three NIH institutes lacked required security and privacy contract language.** The institutes also paid some invoices without reviewing them and conducted performance assessments of a contractor later than required—in one instance, more than a year after the work was completed. Auditors reviewed the \$21.7 million spent by the National Cancer Institute (NCI), National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute and the National Institute on Drug Abuse for IT purchased in fiscal years 2019 and 2020. NCI had two orders; there was one each from the other institutes. Only one contractor was involved—Information Management Services Inc. “Specifically, the contracting officers or contracting officer’s representatives (CORs) did not: (1) include all requirements for information security and privacy in appropriate acquisition documents and properly complete information security certification checklists; (2) review invoices and recommend invoice payments for 3 of 24 invoices for 1 order; and (3) complete contractor performance assessments timely,” OIG said.

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