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By Theresa Defino

### **NIH Defends Actions to Manage Influence of 'Foreign Malign Talent' Programs**

"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."

[Link to Open Mike blog](#)

[Link to Science letter](#)

[Link to Thorp blog](#)

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