

## United States Senate

February 11, 2026

The Honorable Platte Moring  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Defense Office of Inspector General  
4800 Mark Center Drive  
Alexandria, VA 22350-1500

Dear Inspector General Moring,

Congratulations on being confirmed as the Inspector General for the Department of Defense.

I am writing to you regarding the COST Act, which I authored, that was codified in Section 212(a)(1) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (Public Law 116-283). This law requires that research and development activities paid for with funding from the Pentagon disclose the source and the dollar amount in all public documents.

Specifically, the COST Act states:

**10 U.S. Code § 4027 - Disclosure requirements for recipients of research and development funds**

- (a) In General.— Except as provided in subsections (b) and (c), an individual or entity (including a State or local government) that uses funds received from the Department of Defense to carry out research or development activities shall include, in any public document pertaining to such activities, a clear statement indicating the dollar amount of the funds received from the Department for such activities.
- (b) Exception.— The disclosure requirement under subsection (a) shall not apply to a public document consisting of fewer than 280 characters.
- (c) Waiver.— The Secretary of Defense may waive the disclosure requirement under subsection (a) on a case-by-case basis.
- (d) Public Document Defined.— In this section, the term “public document” means any document or other written statement made available for public reference or use, regardless of whether such document or statement is made available in hard copy or electronic format.

As you recall, I asked you about the lack of compliance with the COST Act during your confirmation hearing before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. At that time, you said: “Senator, if confirmed, the Department’s Inspector General will exercise oversight over the policy implementation that you have incorporated into statute.” Now that you are confirmed, I look forward to working with you to ensure the COST Act is fully implemented.

The purpose of the COST Act is very simple. Posting a public price tag provides greater accountability for ensuring tax dollars are being spent strengthening our nation’s defenses and not being wasted on projects that are defenseless. The Pentagon is entrusted with more than \$140 billion every year to spend on R&D intended to modernize our defenses and equip our service members with the best weapons to defeat adversaries and protect our nation from any threat.<sup>1</sup> This is a crucial mission that comes with a significant cost and taxpayers should be able to see how, or if, their hard-earned tax dollars are being spent to achieve these goals.

The task is also very simple. In fact, the department has placed a public price tag on many of its own publications for years. Here is an example from the Defense budget request provided as part of the president’s annual budget proposal:

**The estimated cost of this report or study for the Department of Defense is approximately \$42,000 for the 2025 Fiscal Year. This includes \$11,000 in expenses and \$31,000 in DoD labor.**

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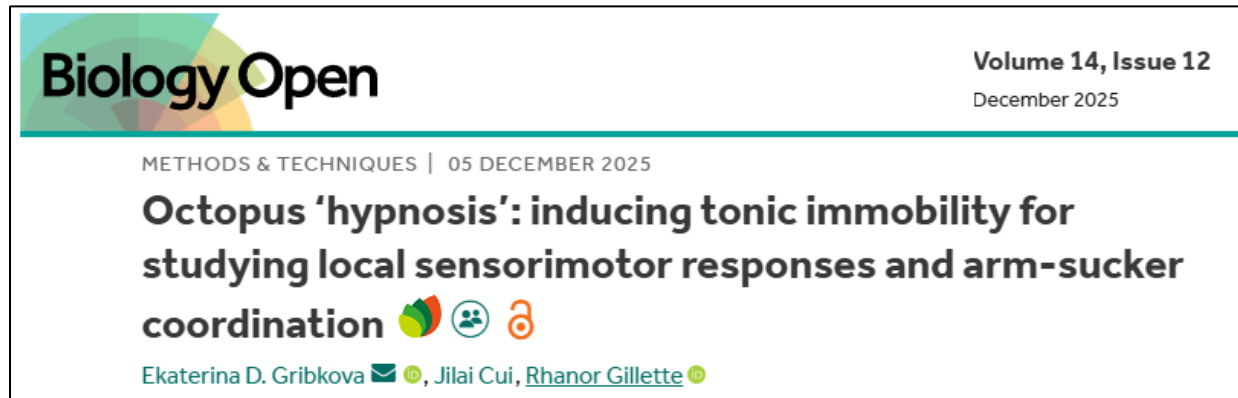
Since the law’s enactment five years ago, reviews by my office have found award recipients often acknowledge receiving R&D funds for general purposes in press releases, but also largely omit the dollar amount in public documents related to specific projects paid for with the funds from the Pentagon, such as individual published studies or press releases sharing the findings of the studies. This is not the full transparency promised to taxpayers required by law. Each individual published study should clearly state the dollar amount paid by the Pentagon.

A few examples of research and development press releases and public documents are provided below, in which recipients identify that funding came from the Department or one of its agencies, but do not disclose the cost to taxpayers.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense Budget, Fiscal Year 2026, Research, Development, Test and Evaluation Programs, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), June 2025; [https://comptroller.war.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2026/FY2026\\_r1.pdf](https://comptroller.war.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2026/FY2026_r1.pdf).

## **EXAMPLE ONE – OCTOPUS HYPNOSIS**



In this Pentagon-funded study, researchers “explore an old, rarely used method of octopus ‘hypnosis’ in which tonic immobility is induced as a complementary and sometime alternative method to general anesthesia.” While the article acknowledges support from the Office of Naval Research (grant N00014-19-1-2373), no dollar amount is listed.<sup>2</sup>

## **EXAMPLE TWO – SLEEPY SEALS**



While this research is funded by the Navy, the subjects of the study are not Navy SEALS but rather the fin-footed, semiaquatic mammals.

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<sup>2</sup> Ekaterina D. Gribkova, Jilai Cui, and Rhanor Gillette, “Octopus ‘hypnosis’: inducing tonic immobility for studying local sensorimotor responses and arm-sucker coordination,” *Biology Open*, December 5, 2025; <https://journals.biologists.com/bio/article/14/12/bio062082/370039/Octopus-hypnosis-inducing-tonic-immobility-for>.

The study states, “One of the central questions about elephant seals has been, ‘When do they sleep?’” The findings: seals may spend ten hours a day sleeping on the beach, but average just two hours of sleep per day when they are at sea on foraging trips.<sup>3</sup>

The sleepy seal study was supported by seven Pentagon grants, including the Strategic Environmental Research and Development Program (grant RC20-C2-1284), the Office of Naval Research (grants N00014-18-1-2822, N00014-00-1-0880, N00014-03-1-0651, N00014-08-1-1195, and N00014-20-1-2762), and the Office of Naval Research Defense University Research Instrumentation Program (grant N00014-19-1-2178), but there is no public price tag providing the total cost.<sup>4</sup>

### **EXAMPLE THREE – SNAIL SLIME**



“What is snail mucus? That was the question posed by researchers in a new study that examines the molecular composition of snail mucus,” funded by the Air Force Office of Scientific

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<sup>3</sup> Brittany Hook, “Elephant Seals Drift Off to Sleep While Diving Far Below the Ocean Surface,” University of California, Scripps Institution of Oceanography, April 20, 2023; <https://scripps.ucsd.edu/news/elephant-seals-drift-sleep-while-diving-far-below-ocean-surface>.

<sup>4</sup> Jessica M. Kendall-Bar, Terrie M. Williams, Ritika Mukherji, Daniel A. Lozano, Julie K. Pitman, Rachel R. Holser, Theresa Keates, Roxanne S. Beltran, Patrick W. Robinson, Daniel E. Crocker, Taiki Adachi, Oleg I. Lyamin, Alexei L. Vyssotski, and Daniel P. Costa, “Brain activity of diving seals reveals short sleep cycles at depth,” Science, Volume 380, Issue 6642, April 20, 2023; <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.adf0566>.

Research and the U.S. Space Force with additional support from the Office of Naval Research.<sup>5</sup> No public price tag is provided for taxpayers.

#### **EXAMPLE FOUR – FACEBOOK DOOMSCROLLING**

Front. Psychol., 02 March 2023  
Sec. Emotion Science  
Volume 14 - 2023 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1068373>

### **The construct of cuteness: A validity study for measuring content and evoked emotions on social media**

It “is necessary and useful” to understand “the role of cute in social media sharing, production, and influence,” claim researchers funded by the Office of Naval Research (grant N00014-19-1-2506).<sup>6</sup> After doomscrolling through more than 4,000 posts on Facebook, the researchers realized, “as everyone on social media knows, jokes, cute things, amazing things are all shared more.”<sup>7</sup> What the researchers did not share, however, was the cost of this study to taxpayers. Nothing cute about that.

#### **EXAMPLE FIVE – MONKEY MIND-READING**

Journal of Neural Engineering

Published 28 November 2022  
[Volume 19, Number 6](#)

PAPER

### **Modeling and inference methods for switching regime-dependent dynamical systems with multiscale neural observations**

<sup>5</sup> “Will It Slip or Will It Grip: Scientists Ask, “What Is Snail Mucus?,” Advanced Science Research Center at the City University of New York Graduate Center, September 5, 2023; <https://asrc.gc.cuny.edu/headlines/2023/09/will-it-slip-or-will-it-grip-scientists-ask-what-is-snail-mucus/>.

<sup>6</sup> Ewa M. Golonka, Kelly M. Jones, Patrick Sheehan, Nick B. Pandža, Susannah B. F. Paletz, C. Anton Rytting, and Michael A. Johns, “The construct of cuteness: A validity study for measuring content and evoked emotions on social media,” *Frontiers in Psychology*, March 2, 2023; <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1068373/full>.

<sup>7</sup> Susannah B. F. Paletz, Michael A. Johns, Egle E. Murauskaite, Ewa M. Golonka, Nick B. Pandža, C. Anton Rytting, Cody Buntain, and Devin Ellis, “Emotional content and sharing on Facebook: A theory cage match,” *Science Advances*, Volume 9, Issue 39, September 29, 2023; <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.ade9231>. Morgan Page, “A Grin Emoji for Advance in Predicting Viral Facebook Posts,” *Maryland Today*, October 13, 2023; <https://today.umd.edu/a-grin-emoji-for-advance-in-predicting-viral-facebook-posts>.

A study supported by the Army Research Office (contract W911NF-16-1-0368) attempted to decode and interpret the brain signals of monkeys.<sup>8</sup>

While the cost to taxpayers is not listed, a news article on the research reports, “the Army is providing up to \$6.25 million in funding over five years” for the total project that includes this study.<sup>9</sup>

Coincidentally, it’s been five years since the mind-reading monkey study was announced and while I’m looking forward to learning what’s on the minds of monkeys, I already know what’s on taxpayers’ minds—they’re fed up with Washington wasting the money they worked hard to earn.

That is why I authored the COST Act provision in the NDAA, so taxpayers can decide for themselves if a Pentagon project strengthens our nation’s defenses or, possibly, is indefensible.

I am, therefore, requesting the Department of Defense Inspector General (DODIG) conduct a thorough review of enforcement and compliance with this law since its enactment five-years ago, specifically:

- 1) Review any regulations, rules, guidance, or instructions issued by the department to funding recipients detailing their responsibilities to disclose the costs of activities paid for with funds from the Pentagon;
- 2) Review and evaluate training for the department’s officials to ensure award recipients are aware of their responsibilities;
- 3) Determine how, or if, the department is examining public statements issued by funding recipients, including specific published studies, and notifying any award recipients not providing the required cost information of this lack of compliance with the law;
- 4) Review a sampling of public documents, including press releases and published studies, pertaining to R&D activities funded by the Pentagon to determine if clear statements are being provided indicating the dollar amount of the funds received from the department that supported those activities; and
- 5) Issue recommendations to ensure every funding recipient is fully complying with the requirements to disclose the dollar amount for all activities paid for with funding from the department.

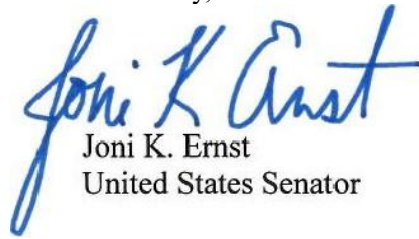
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<sup>8</sup> Christian Y. Song, Han-Lin Hsieh, Bijan Pesaran, and Maryam M. Shanechi, “Modeling and inference methods for switching regime-dependent dynamical systems with multiscale neural observations,” *Journal of Neural Engineering*, Volume 19, Number 6; <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1741-2552/ac9b94> or <https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2022.06.09.494416v1.full.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Eversden, “Could soldiers silently communicate using brain signals in the future?,” C4ISRNET, November 25, 2020; <https://www.c4isrnet.com/battlefield-tech/it-networks/2020/11/25/could-soldiers-silently-communicate-using-brain-signals-in-the-future/>.

Thank you again for your attention to this important effort, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joni K. Ernst". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joni" and last name "Ernst" clearly legible. The middle initial "K" is smaller and positioned between the first and last names.

Joni K. Ernst  
United States Senator