

GOVERNMENT STUDIES OLD CLICHÉ

QUICK STATS

- ✘ **CONFERENCE:** Spending
- ✘ **TEAM:** National Science Foundation
- **FUMBLE:** \$149,000
- **HOW TO RECOVER THE BALL:** Raise the standard for meritorious grant proposals and steer more political science funds toward transformative grants

It is an axiom of American cultural norms that politics is a taboo subject in social settings. While it may be a faux pas to engage in this discussion at the next dinner party, the federal government will utilize taxpayer dollars to delve further into the discomfort that people experience when forced to discuss what some consider to be privately held political views.

Last year, NSF awarded a nearly \$150,000 grant for a researcher “to better understand which facets of social interaction about politics are most stress inducing, for which kinds of people, and in which contexts.”²⁴⁶ The ultimate goal is to decrease that stress in order to “energize and enfranchise citizens who are discouraged by our current political system.”²⁴⁷ There is no doubt that civil discourse is critical for a more successful and vibrant democracy. But it is doubtful that connecting stress to political interactions is a topic the agency “tasked with keeping the United States at the leading edge of discovery” should spend scarce federal resources to study.²⁴⁸

A recent study found that 86 percent of those polled experienced some amount of stress during the preceding month.²⁴⁹ Nearly 40

percent of respondents stated that hearing about government and politicians contributed to their stress.²⁵⁰ One could argue that the most stressful thing about politics is the waste and bloat of government spending, including researching topics such as this.

As millions of American families come together this holiday season to enjoy family, food, and football, many dinner conversations will inevitably steer toward politics. Some family members will enjoy sharing their viewpoints while others will shy away or simply be annoyed by the dialogue. Regardless of where one lies on this spectrum, learning that the federal government will spend nearly triple the median American salary to explore this cliché will give more reason for heartburn than just the turkey and gravy.

RECOVERY

Congress should work with NSF to lay out parameters and expectations for grants. Before awarding grants, NSF should show how the funds will advance American interests and fulfill NSF’s mission.

For more information, please visit:

[NSF: Understanding the Mechanisms for Disengagement from Contentious Political Interaction](#)
[The Washington Post: Politicians are the No. 1 cause of daily stress in our lives](#)