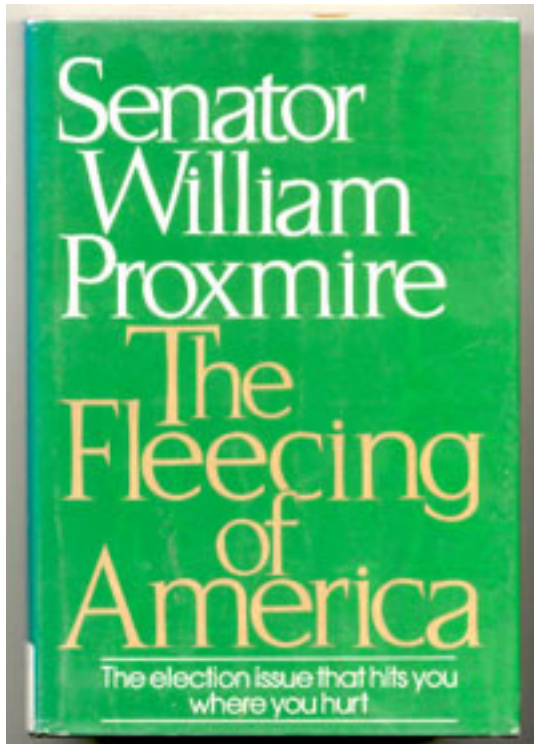


GAO Report Wins Literature Prize

Written by Nick Sanders

Friday, 28 September 2012 00:00



Occasionally, we take issue with the quality of audit reports issued by the various oversight agencies. For instance, we [once wrote](#) that an audit report from the NASA Inspector General's office included a paragraph filled with "a bunch of nonsensical gobbledygook," and called the IG auditors "apparently clueless." We took

[another opportunity](#)

to criticize an audit report from the Department of Energy's Inspector General, writing that it unquestioningly relied on the work of Los Alamos' internal audit function, while overlooking an apparently fundamental conflict of interest in the personnel performing the internal audits. And don't even get us started listing the number of times we've criticized DCAA! (Okay, here's a

[good one](#)

.)

But we are not the only ones looking at the output of government oversight agencies. Not at all. And recently, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) was awarded a literature prize of the quality of one of its audits. It was awarded the 2012 Ig® Nobel Prize for literature.

The Ig® Nobel Prizes are awarded for those research projects (or audit reports) "that first make people laugh, and then make them think." According to the website of the [Improbable Research](#)

organization, the IG® Nobel Prizes are awarded annually, and actually handed out by

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“bemused genuine Nobel laureates.”

The GAO was among distinguished company. Other winners included a fluid dynamics [analysis](#) of what happens when a person carries a cup of coffee while walking, and a psychological [paper](#) discussing why the fact that the Eiffel Tower leans to the left makes it look smaller. Past winners have included papers carrying such titles as “No Evidence of Contagious Yawning in the Red-Footed Tortoise,” “How to Procrastinate and Still Get Things Done,” and “Swearing as a Response to Pain.” Just to mention a few.

The GAO report that won the literature prize was entitled, “Actions Needed to Evaluate the Impact of Efforts to Estimate Costs of Reports and Studies”—[GAO-12-480R](#), dated May 10, 2012. The report criticizes DOD’s methodology for calculating the cost of providing reports and studies (which was undertaken pursuant to DOD’s “[Better Buying Power Initiative](#)”). The GAO report recommended that the Secretary of Defense evaluate the methodology being used and take steps to improve the calculation of the cost of providing reports and studies.

The IG® Nobel Literature Prize award described the GAO report as being “a report about reports about reports that recommends the preparation of a report about the report about reports about reports.”

The Defense Industrial Daily commented that the IG® Prize description was “close enough” to the actual report content.

Clearly, the Better Buying Power Initiative is working out just about as we [predicted](#).