



WEEKLY WASTE REPORT for September 8, 2015

In the ZONE, A Perception of Waste

Some athletes call it “the zone,” the sense of being on your game; the feeling you are so hot that you are on fire; you just cannot miss. But it seems the **National Science Foundation (NSF) did miss when it spent \$350k to fund a study of athletes in the zone.**

That’s right, a study, originally funded in 2010 and conducted by researchers at Purdue University, looked at how perception relates to performance. **The grant leads off with, “[a]thletes playing well describe distortions in spatial perception: basketball hoops appear as large as hula-hoops, golf holes as big as manholes, and baseballs as big as grapefruits.”<sup>1</sup>** The big question here? Do athletes play well because they perceive baseballs to be as big as grapefruits, does the perception materialize when playing well, or is it just a false memory?

This is already sounding very **similar to the NSF-funded study covered in The Waste Report of July, 14, *Feeling Bad About Government Waste?***, where NSF spent \$175k to figure out how good people are at predicting how they will feel about decisions they make.

So, what was learned in this study? In tennis, players who hit the ball out of bounds thought it came at them faster than those who hit it in play, and **when playing Pong (yes, a version of the video game Pong) the virtual ball seems to move slower when the paddle is bigger.<sup>2</sup>**

But most fascinating (as in why are taxpayers paying for this?) was **an experiment relating to the perception of walls in parkour.** What is parkour, you ask. Well, sometimes called “free running,” parkour is **an urban sport involving scaling and jumping off walls, similar to what is seen on *American Ninja Warrior*.** And, thanks to NSF’s funding, **we’ve learned that traceurs (skilled parkour athletes) see walls they may scale as shorter than novices and presumably everyone else.<sup>3</sup>**

While a professional sports team or a trainer may find value in understanding how an athletes’ perception may influence their performance (or visa-versa), Uncle Sam should leave it up to those entities to provide the funding for such projects.

**Government’s Use of Tax Dollars: Definitely not in the Zone.**

<sup>1</sup> *Action's Effect on Perception*, NSF; Research at Purdue University; Award No. 0957051.

<sup>2</sup> *Performance and ease influence perceived speed*, Witt, JK ; Sugovic, M. Web of Science Core Collection; PION LTD, 207 BRONDESBURY PARK, LONDON NW2 5JN, ENGLAND; 2010

<sup>3</sup> *What is Parkour*, World Freerunning and Parkour; <http://www.wfpf.com/parkour/>