

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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June 17, 2025

Ms. Kari Lake
Senior Advisor
U.S. Agency for Global Media
330 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20237

Dear Ms. Lake:

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is conducting oversight of the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), especially longstanding security vulnerabilities exacerbated by mismanagement—a situation that persisted for years at the agency. The Committee has reason to believe that USAGM routinely and improperly utilized visa programs to employ poorly vetted foreign nationals, including from nations adverse to the United States. The Committee is also aware that USAGM officials abused their authority when awarding grants, including by awarding them to entities despite major conflicts of interest. To assist the Committee’s investigation and to ensure that any longstanding security vulnerabilities and abuses are urgently exposed and addressed by your leadership, we request documents from you in your capacity as Senior Advisor with delegated authority of the Chief Executive Officer of the USAGM.

The USAGM has a budget of just less than \$1 billion¹ to fulfill its mission of “inform[ing], engag[ing] and connect[ing] people around the world in support of freedom and democracy.”² The agency has two “federal networks”—Voice of America and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting—and five purportedly independent “networks and grantees,” which include Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia (RFA), Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Open Technology Fund (OTF), and Frontline Media Fund.³

Multiple investigations have revealed persistent abuses at the USAGM, its networks and grantees.⁴ On March 14, President Trump issued an Executive Order eliminating the non-

¹ *Budget and Financial Reports*, U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOB. MEDIA (last visited Apr. 16, 2025).

² *Who we are*, U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOB. MEDIA (last visited Apr. 16, 2025).

³ *Structure*, U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOB. MEDIA (last visited Apr. 16, 2025).

⁴ *See, e.g.*, U.S. OFF. OF PERS. MGMT., SUITABILITY EXEC. AGENT PROGRAMS, FOLLOW-UP REVIEW OF THE U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOB. MEDIA SUITABILITY PROGRAM (July 2020); H. COMM. ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, REPORT ON THE OFFICE OF LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS AT THE U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA (June 12, 2024); *The Voice of Radical America*, THE WHITE HOUSE (Mar. 15, 2025); U.S. DEP’T OF STATE, OFF. OF INSPECTOR GEN., AUD-FM-IB-15-24, AUDIT OF RADIO FREE ASIA EXPENDITURES (June 2015); Letter from Rep. Scott Perry to Kelu Chao, Acting CEO, U.S. Agency for Global Media (Mar. 25, 2022); THE HERITAGE FOUND., 2025 MANDATE FOR

statutory components and functions of the USAGM, among other entities.⁵ In doing so, President Donald Trump quoted Dan Robinson, “a 34-year veteran of Voice of America and its former White House correspondent,” who wrote last year:

I have monitored the agency’s bureaucracy along with many of its reporters and concluded that it has essentially become a hubris-filled rogue operation often reflecting a leftist bias aligned with partisan national media. It has sought to avoid accountability for violations of journalistic standards and mismanagement.⁶

The Committee seeks to make certain that in its new posture, USAGM, its networks, and grantees do not further abuse their authority and leave the agency and the country vulnerable to national security risks.

The U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General (OIG) found security vulnerabilities at USAGM and determined that RFA leadership awarded insiders millions of dollars in grant funding.⁷ Reportedly, the Biden Administration reversed “long-overdue and necessary reforms, including security reforms” that the first Trump Administration implemented to address repeated requests “by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) that had been ignored by USAGM.”⁸ There are serious concerns that “USAGM is vulnerable to exploitation by foreign spies.”⁹

Evidence of this vulnerability is a disturbing finding that “over 1,500 USAGM personnel (nearly 40 percent of its total workforce) were performing their Tier 3 and Tier 5 national-security-sensitive positions with falsified and/or unauthorized suitability-for-employment determinations and with access to sensitive federal building and information systems.”¹⁰ Reportedly, “[i]n many cases, records (including Social Security numbers), were falsified or replaced with notional placeholders, and fingerprints (in many dozens of cases) were never submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for basic background investigations.”¹¹ Many of these individuals ultimately left USAGM and “rolled into other federal agencies with reciprocal clearance authorizations” while others “disappeared into U.S. society.”¹² Today, the whereabouts and clearance status of these individuals is unknown.

LEADERSHIP: THE CONSERVATIVE PROMISE (2023), at 235-45; Jordan Boyd, *VOA Exec Fired For Reports Of Misconduct, Fraud, and False Credentials Quickly Rehired Under Biden*, THE FEDERALIST (Feb. 25, 2021).

⁵ Exec. Order 14238, 90 Fed. Reg. 13043 (Mar. 20, 2025); see also Presidential Actions, *Continuing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy*, THE WHITE HOUSE (Mar. 14, 2025).

⁶ *The Voice of Radical America*, *supra* note 4 (quoting Dan Robinson, *Voice of America, Global Media Agency are rightly in budget cut bull’s-eye*, WASH. TIMES (Nov. 27, 2024)).

⁷ U.S. DEP’T OF STATE, *supra* note 4.

⁸ THE HERITAGE FOUND., *supra* note 4, at 239.

⁹ *Id.* at 241.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

Similarly, it appears that the locations of “foreign-based journalists in high-risk countries” are unknown to the USAGM—despite efforts to identify their locations “in the event they required rescue, extraction, or safe housing.”¹³ The locations are unknown due to willful ignorance by USAGM through what has been described as “the agency’s selective application” of its so-called “firewall.”¹⁴ In 2020, the firewall was implemented as a regulation in the Federal Register and nominally exists to protect journalistic independence.¹⁵ USAGM’s interpretation of the firewall notoriously shifted over time “depending on which Administration is in office and who is asking questions.”¹⁶ Even before enactment as a regulation, the firewall was reportedly used to “shirk legitimate oversight of everything from promoting adversaries’ propaganda to ignoring journalistic safety.”¹⁷

Potential security vulnerabilities at USAGM extend to the abuse of U.S. visa programs for foreign nationals. Reportedly, “[r]ather than use the appropriate I visa¹⁸ intended for foreign journalists, USAGM uses the J-1 ‘cultural exchange’ visa to allow foreign nationals to transition easily into jobs that American citizens with cultural and linguistic expertise could satisfy.”¹⁹ Accordingly, “[t]he J-1 visa is intended for cultural and academic exchange programs, among others—none of which include journalism”²⁰ and that “J-1 visas are meant for non-immigrant temporary exchanges.”²¹ Yet, reportedly, “[t]he USAGM’s J-1 visa holders often go on to apply for permanent residency, which violates the intention of this visa.”²² The misuse of the J-1 nonimmigrant visa program to bring in foreign nationals who actually have immigrant intent—compounded by improper vetting practices described above—raises serious concerns that the USAGM exposed the U.S. to security threats and even served as a conduit for foreign spies to infiltrate the U.S. government and obtain access to highly sensitive, even classified information.

Additionally, the OIG found what has been characterized as “waste and self-dealing, including security vulnerability and RFA leadership awarding insiders millions of dollars of grant funding.”²³ For example, the OIG found:

RFA did not comply with Federal procurement requirements for grantees. OIG identified instances in which RFA and its agents did not comply with OMB conflict-of interest procurement requirements for grantees.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.* at 239

¹⁵ 22 C.F.R. § 531 (2020).

¹⁶ *Id.* at 239.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.* at 242 (citing *Visas for Members of the Foreign Media, Press, and Radio*, U.S. DEP’T OF STATE (last visited Apr. 16, 2025)).

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.*; *Id.* at 250 n.39 (explaining that “[a]uthorized positions for J-1 visas include: au pair, camp counselor, college/university student, government visitor, intern, international visitor, physician, professor, research scholar, secondary school student, short-term scholar, specialist, STEM initiatives, summer work travel, teacher, and trainee.”); See *Exchange Visitor Visa*, U.S. DEP’T OF STATE (last visited Apr. 16, 2025).

²¹ THE HERITAGE FOUND., *supra* note 4, at 242.

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.* at 237.

Specifically, OIG found that RFA entered into 14 contracts, totaling \$4.0 million (51 percent of the amount of OTF FYs 2012 and 2013 project related contracts), with organizations that had some affiliation with either RFA officials or members of the OTF Advisory Council.²⁴

These concerns must be urgently addressed to ensure that USAGM does not continue to pose national security risks and engage in improper or unethical behavior through its networks and grantees.

To assist the Committee's oversight of this matter, we request the following documents and information, as soon as possible but no later than July 1, 2025:

National Security Risks

1. Information detailing national security and insider threats that USAGM, its networks and grantees, and their security offices have identified within the agency, its networks and grantees over the last five years;
2. Policies and practices to ensure that foreign nationals employed as translators at USAGM, its networks and grantees, including those who may go on to work elsewhere in the U.S. Government, do not pose insider threats for the country;
3. Documents and communications reflecting USAGM's issuance of J-1 visas to journalists—instead of I visas—over the past five years;
 - a. Include the number of J-1 visas and I visas granted and denied;
4. The number of USAGM personnel, employees, and journalists, and contractors who have held security clearances—including the level of the clearance held—over the past five years;
5. The justification for maintaining a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility at RFA and any other offices within USAGM, its networks and grantees;
6. A list of the names of all fellows at USAGM grantee organizations and entities, including but not limited to RFA and OTF, over the past five years;

Budget and Financial Records

7. The International Broadcasting Advisory Board's (IBAB) annual budget since its inception in December 2023;
8. OTF's annual budget for the past five years;

²⁴ U.S. DEP'T OF STATE, *supra* note 4, at 16.

- a. Include the amounts budgeted for work in Canada, Mexico, and that specifically for expenses related to overcoming the Chinese Communist Party's firewall;
9. Full financial statements and records of USAGM grantees for the past five years, including a listing of all beneficial owners of each grantee and subgrantee organization;

Location of Personnel

10. The number of USAGM, network and grantee employees and contractors residing in the Washington, D.C. area during the last two years;
11. The number of USAGM, network, and grantee employees and contractors residing outside of the Washington, D.C. area during the last two years;
 - a. Specify the locations where these personnel have resided and the number of personnel in each location;
 - b. Include the justification for basing personnel at each location.;

Conflicts of Interest and Other Potential Abuses

12. List of IBAB members who have also served on the board of any USAGM grantee;
 - a. Include the names of these board members, the dates of their respective board membership, and whether and how the USAGM addressed any conflicts of interest;
13. All grant agreements between the USAGM and grant recipients from the past five years;
14. Records showing any IBAB members who have also been beneficiaries of the Frontline Media Fund (formerly Accelerator);
15. Circumstances surrounding any instances in which USAGM grantees made awards to subgrantees that share board members or personnel with that USAGM grantee;
 - a. Include documents and records detailing the date the award(s) was granted, the amount of money awarded, the name of the USAGM grantee that gave the award and the personnel involved, the name of the subgrantee that received the award and the personnel at that subgrantee;
16. Documents and records reflecting USAGM's work on so-called "disinformation," "misinformation," "malinformation," and "malign influence" over the past five years;

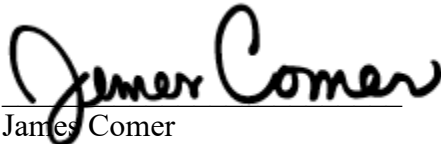
Settlement Agreements and Investigation

17. Copies of all settlement agreements that USAGM has entered into over the past five years and settlement agreements for more than \$250,000 over the past 10 years;

18. An unredacted copy of the report that McGuireWoods LLP compiled as part of the internal investigation it conducted on USAGM's behalf.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. To arrange for the delivery of documents or to ask any related follow-up questions, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Majority staff at (202) 225-5074. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



James Comer
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform



Marjorie Taylor Greene
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Delivering on
Government Efficiency

cc: The Honorable Stephen Lynch
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

The Honorable Melanie Stansbury, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Delivering on Government Efficiency