

SUPPORT THE UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS REFORM ACT OF 2014

“Broadcasting Board of Governors is practically defunct in terms of its capacity to be able to tell a message around the world.” - Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, January 23, 2013, Testimony to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs

“[the BBG] mission is not to be a government-sponsored CNN, but rather a strategic instrument of national-security policy. Fortunately, Congress is exploring reforms to enable these services to re-emerge as a meaningful element of American power.” – John Lenczowski, April 17, 2014, Wall Street Journal

Frequently Asked Questions:

► **What does the bill do?** First and foremost, we are clarifying missions. By bringing Voice of America (VOA) into the Department of State’s public diplomacy arm, we realign this broadcaster with its original congressional mandate: telling America’s story and explaining U.S. policy in a way that local audiences can understand. By bringing the “Radio Free” surrogate broadcasters together – Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Free Asia (RFA), and the Middle East Broadcasting Network (MBN) – we achieve economies of scale among three entities that all along have shared the same goal: providing uncensored local and regional news to people in closed societies, and telling the stories their own governments are trying to suppress.

Thus, based on mission, we are consolidating six organizations (those listed above, along with the Office of Cuba Broadcasting and the International Broadcasting Bureau) into two. One organization charged with public diplomacy – the **U.S. International Communications Agency (“USICA”)** – and one organization charged with acting as the free press in a closed society – the **Freedom News Network (“FNN”)**.

► **How will the United States International Communications Agency and the Freedom News Network operate?** Each organization will have its own CEO and its own board. Currently, the Broadcasting Board of Governors oversees all U.S. international broadcasting efforts and is lead by a board consisting of nine presidentially-appointed and Senate-confirmed members. While this board will continue to exist (with nine appointed and confirmed members), its role will be reduced to an advisory one and a Chief Executive Officer will be hired to run the day-to-day agency operations. The Freedom News Network will be led by a new CEO and a new, private advisory board, and will thus function much like the National Endowment for Democracy.

► **What are the other differences between the United States International Communications Agency and the Freedom News Network?** The United States International Communications Agency (“USICA”) is a federal agency with unionized employees; an agency head selected by a

presidentially appointed and Senate confirmed board; and a mission to support U.S. public diplomacy. The Freedom News Network (“FNN”) is a private, non-federal corporation that receives federal grants and provides uncensored local news and information to people in closed societies.

► **Why create two organizations? Doesn’t this create two agencies instead of one?** Currently, there is a nine-member board overseeing six different organizations; this legislation will reduce six to two. The reason for the separation is to clarify mission and consolidate. We believe that organizations with a clear mission and flexible resources are better positioned for success.

► **Why can’t one person oversee both organizations?** That’s been tried in the past but it hasn’t worked. In the 1970’s and 1980’s the United States Information Agency (USIA) had that role and, in the eyes of Congress, USIA was too detached from U.S. foreign policy. In addition, a single agency head would unnecessarily keep the private, non-federal grantees tied to an inherently inefficient and bureaucratic structure. Coordination is mandated in this legislation and increased coordination should negate the need for a single agency head.

► **Does Congress have the authority to mandate that a private corporation consolidate with another private corporation?** Yes. Congress has the authority to condition funding appropriations on certain agency action, and we are exercising that authority in this legislation. By way of example, in the 1994 U.S. International Broadcasting Act, Congress imposed a similar mandate upon RFE/RL and RFA, and conditioned their receipt of funds upon the dismemberment of their respective Boards.

► **Does Congress have the authority to establish a board for a private organization?** In the past, Congress has made appointments to advisory commissions (National Committee on Vital Health Statistics, Advisory Committee on the Records of Congress, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, etc.) which have the same function as the advisory board we have legislated for the Freedom News Network. The congressional mandate in this legislation will survive legal scrutiny because congressional involvement in the functions of the board is not continuing or indefinite.

► **How will this reform change language services?** This legislation only addresses structural and functional problems of the agency – it does not address the various language services. Before we can reasonably be expected to talk about the implementation of programming, we need to have an organization in place that is prepared to execute programming effectively and efficiently. This reform represents this important first step.

► **Does this destroy the so-called “firewall” that prevents the State Department from micromanaging VOA content?** No. The legislation makes clear that the State Department must respect the journalistic integrity of those working for VOA. The legislation *does* increase collaboration between VOA and the State Department, so that our public diplomacy objectives are met.

► **Aren’t they all doing broadcasting? Why shouldn’t there be a single agency doing this?** Broadcasting is a mechanism of communication; it is not an end in and of itself. Just because

two organizations use broadcasting as their tool doesn't mean they are working towards the same objectives and goals. While both the State Department and the Defense Department interact with foreign governments, their different missions and goals require two different organizations. As we've seen, a one size fits all approach to our international broadcasting effort is not working.

► **Will these reforms save money?** Yes, and potentially a lot. The legislation narrows the mission of VOA, consolidates the International Broadcasting Bureau, which currently provides all the broadcasters with administrative and technical support, and consolidates the three Radio Free "surrogate" broadcasters. All of these organizations will need to right-size. At VOA, we have put a freeze on hiring to fill vacancies of senior level positions, to reduce the organization's top-heavy nature (37 percent of VOA's employees are eligible for retirement). We have also mandated an end to the abusive contracting practices at the BBG (contractors account for nearly 40% of BBG employees). We estimate that these reforms could save up to \$100 million from current appropriations levels.

► **Will this reform diminish congressional oversight?** No. Congress retains the same authorities it has always possessed with regard to the broadcast entities – namely, the power of the purse and the ability to seek information and investigate the organization's activities as needed. These same powers will still apply to both the International Communications Agency and the Freedom News Network. The Office of the Inspector General ("OIG") and the Government Accountability Office ("GAO") will continue to conduct oversight and audits of both organizations just as they do now.

► **Why not eliminate the BBG Board altogether?** If the Board can be reduced to an advisory capacity, it still has value. While there have been well documented cases of unqualified people serving as Board members, many have years of experience in the field of public diplomacy, media, and communications. That knowledge has been helpful and will continue to be useful if channeled into an advisory capacity.