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One Hundred Seventeenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
www.foreignaffairs.house.gov

December 19, 2022

Amanda Bennett
Chief Executive Officer
U.S. Agency for Global Media
330 Independence Avenue SW
Washington D.C., 20237

Dear Ms. Bennett,

In 2020, USAGM Labor and Employer Relations (LER) staff investigated a senior VOA Persian official, Setareh Derakhshesh Sieg. That December, LER released a lengthy and detailed report that recommended Ms. Sieg be removed for falsifying her credentials and abusing public funds. However, in February 2021, shortly after President Biden took office, VOA officials rehired Ms. Sieg, possibly at the urging of then-acting CEO Kelu Chao. The agency chose not to place Sieg on administrative leave, and instead launched a second investigation that ultimately exonerated her.¹

Whistleblowers inside the agency contacted the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) and several other congressional offices – both Democrat and Republican – regarding the peculiar and troubling nature of this agency about-face. After extensive consultation with the French Embassy and after repeated stonewalling by USAGM, several members of Congress and I sent official document requests in a letter dated October 27, 2021. To our dissatisfaction, the responses that USAGM provided were inadequate and failed to take account of various inconsistencies regarding Sieg’s alleged credentials.

This letter serves as a formal reminder of your obligation to preserve and deliver documents regarding our original request. This issue will be a priority for the Committee in the 118th Congress. Formal requests for transcribed interviews will be forthcoming. If the agency continues to be unresponsive, the Committee will use compulsory process to obtain relevant information.

¹ See generally, Jimmy Quinn, “GOP Alleges Corruption at Global Media Agency,” *National Review*, Nov. 5, 2021; Bill Gertz, “House GOP members say VOA stonewalling probe of Persian service official,” *Washington Times*, Nov. 10, 2021; Jordan Boyd, “VOA Exec Fired for Reports of Misconduct, Fraud, And False Credentials Quickly Rehired Under Biden,” *The Federalist*, Feb. 25, 2021.

Thus, as we did in our letter in October 2021, we ask that the following documents be provided to this committee as soon as possible:

1. Any and all correspondence from James McClaren, Acting General Counsel of USAGM, to Kelu Chao and LER employees (including but not limited to David Kotz, Michelle Stewart, and Janessa Coleman) regarding Chao's ethics obligations as they pertain to Setareh Derakhshesh Sieg.
2. Any and all correspondence from McClaren suggesting that Chao was "conflicted out" and/or recused from all decision making or influence whatsoever in the investigation of Setareh Derakhshesh Sieg.
3. All emails from McClaren and Karen Mayo discussing Sieg from August 2020 to present.
4. All emails between Kotz, Stewart, and Coleman regarding Sieg from August 2020 to present.
5. Any and all correspondence from John Lippman, VOA Acting Director of Programming, regarding Sieg from August 2020 to present.
6. Any and all correspondence to or from Mark Zaid and David Seide with LER and/or Kelu Chao from August 2020 to present.
7. Any and all emails from McClaren, David Kotz, Michelle Stewart, Janessa Coleman, John Lippman, Elizabeth Robbins, and Michael Pack regarding the LET investigation into Setareh Sieg from August 2020 to present.
8. Any and all emails to or from the Trump or Biden White House Presidential Personnel Offices (PPO) regarding Kelu Chao and/or Setareh Sieg from August 2020 to present.
9. Any and all emails from personal and work accounts between Max Amini and Sieg from August 2020 to present.
10. Any and all emails from personal and work accounts between Sieg and Chao from August 2020 to present.
11. All documents pertaining to removal and rehiring of Sieg in 2021.
12. A description of the roles and responsibilities Sieg has performed at USAGM since February 2021.
13. All reports written in part or in whole by Michelle Stewart regarding Sieg, including ones written prior to 2020.
14. Any emails between Stewart and McLaren from August 2020 to present.
15. Any correspondence between Chao and Michael Cushing and Nick Schwellenbach from August 2020 to present.
16. A list of all individuals involved in the security clearance process for Sieg.
17. An explanation as to whether the security investigation regarding Sieg completed at the appropriate level, and, if it was not, confirmation of whether any lower-level security investigation was completed at all.
18. A list of sensitive materials Sieg may have worked on, and what risk mitigation tactics the agency has employed since learning of the OPM finding regarding the Persian News Network.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL T. McCAUL

Republican Leader

House Foreign Affairs Committee

CC: Rep. Guy Reschenthaler, Member of Congress, Chief Deputy Whip

Rep. John Curtis, Member of Congress

Rep. Scott Perry, Member of Congress

Rep. Gregory Meeks, Chairman, House Foreign Affairs Committee