

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

25 March 2022

Kelu Chao, Acting Chief Executive Officer
U.S. Agency for Global Media
330 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20237

Dear Ms. Chao,

Voice of America (VOA) has a proud and storied history of promoting American values abroad, and it's the largest and oldest of USAGM's international broadcasters. During the Cold War, VOA gave access to hundreds of millions of people living under Communist subjugation "a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news."¹ VOA was an institution that was proud to represent American values to the world.

Your predecessor, former CEO Michael Pack, committed himself diligently to the necessary work of reforming a VOA broadcasting service that had grown exceedingly partisan over the past several years. Unfortunately, much of the progress made by Mr. Pack and his staff has been overturned under your leadership, as USAGM clearly promotes partisanship and an aversion to Congressional oversight. In what can only be described as a fall of Faustian proportions, VOA has abandoned its sacred mission to authentically promote our Nation's interests – which not only is unfortunate, it's a dereliction of duty and defies VOA's Congressionally approved Charter.

In December 2015, VOA Persian News Network employee Masih Alinejad is seen pushing Americans to make negative statements against then-candidate Donald Trump; at one point even giving a high-five to someone expressing their disapproval of Mr. Trump: <https://ir.voanews.com/a/3097627.html>. Notwithstanding Ms. Alinejad's past statements condemning the evil Iranian regime and promoting human rights in Iran, her role in disparaging a Presidential candidate arguably amounts to electioneering, which violates federal law.

The American People saw another example of VOA's partisan slant when its Urdu Service publicized what was effectively a campaign video on behalf of then-candidate Joe Biden during the 2020 presidential election.² Last year, under your leadership, VOA re-hired Setareh Derakhshesh Sieg, formerly the director of the broadcasting service's Persian News Network. Ms. Sieg had been dismissed during your predecessor's tenure for misusing / squandering / wasting nearly \$1 million in Agency funds, and lying about her credentials that claimed she held a doctorate from the Sorbonne. Current and former VOA and Agency officials have also said that under Ms. Sieg's leadership, the VOA Persian Service was known as the "Voice of Tehran, not the Voice of America...it parroted regime content."³ A 2016 report from the Office of Personnel Management indicated that over 60% of VOA Persian employees under Sieg's authority "believe

¹ *United States Agency for Global Media*. USAGM. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2022, from <https://www.usagm.gov/who-we-are/oversight/legislation/voa-charter/>

² Lippman, D. (2020, July 30). *Deleted Biden video sets off a crisis at Voice of America*. POLITICO. Retrieved March 15, 2022, from <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/30/deleted-biden-video-sets-off-a-crisis-at-voice-of-america-388571>

³ Gertz, Bill. (2021, February 18). *VOA Executive Setareh Derakhshesh Sieg fired under Trump rehired by Biden*. The Washington Times. Retrieved March 15, 2022 from <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/feb/18/voa-executive-setareh-derakhshesh-sieg-fired-under/>.

that arbitrary action, personal favoritism, and **coercion for partisan political purposes** are tolerated at VOA Persian.”⁴

Despite legitimate concerns regarding Ms. Sieg’s failure to uphold the VOA’s charter (as well as her inability to follow U.S. law), the Agency chose to rehire her, basing its decision on the argument that the first investigation against Ms. Sieg was somehow not “complete.” The VOA Charter clearly states that the broadcasting service “...will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant thought and institutions.”⁵ The examples highlighted in this letter raise concerns regarding VOA’s commitment to its own Charter.

Pursuant to my Constitutional oversight responsibilities, I request answers to the following inquiries **no later than April 7, 2022**:

1) Why is the aforementioned December 2015 video still accessible publicly via the link provided? Was Masih Alinejad specifically held accountable for violating VOA’s charter when she ridiculed a major candidate for President? Is Ms. Alinejad still employed at the Agency and, if so, in what capacity?

2) What disciplinary action was taken against those responsible for airing a campaign ad for then-candidate Joe Biden? Are these individuals still employed at the Agency and, if so, in what capacity?

3) I require copies of any and all records, including any audits, reports, memoranda, drafts, or emails (including those from personal email accounts) regarding concerns with Setareh Derakhshesh Sieg’s leadership of the VOA’s Persian News Network. This includes concerns of VOA’s coverage of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the Trump Administration’s withdrawal from the JCPOA, the assassination of Qassim Soleimani, and any other topic covered by VOA in which concerns were raised regarding Ms. Sieg’s commitment to the VOA Charter.

4) Since January 20, 2021, what steps, if any, has VOA taken to ensure that US Taxpayers are not subsidizing partisan agendas?

We appreciate your cooperation with this request, and await your responses by April 7, 2022.

Respectfully,



SCOTT PERRY
Member of Congress



ANDY BIGGS
Member of Congress

⁴ Boyd, Jordan. (2021, February 25). *VOA Exec Fired For Reports of Misconduct, Fraud, and False Credentials Quickly Rehired Under Biden*. The Federalist. Retrieved March 15, 2022 from <https://thefederalist.com/2021/02/25/voa-exec-fired-for-reports-of-misconduct-fraud-and-false-credentials-quickly-rehired-under-biden/>

⁵ *United States Agency for Global Media*. USAGM. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2022, from <https://www.usagm.gov/who-we-are/oversight/legislation/voa-charter/>



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