

ASSESSING STATE DEPARTMENT COMPLIANCE WITH OVERSIGHT

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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ASSESSING STATE DEPARTMENT COMPLIANCE WITH OVERSIGHT

Thursday, March 21, 2024

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:59 p.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Brian Mast (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. MAST. The Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability will come to order. The purpose of this hearing is to assess the State Department's compliance with congressional oversight by analyzing the efficiency and transparency between State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs and House Foreign Affairs Committee. Now, before we get going, I will be recognizing the chairman of the full committee for an opening statement, and the ranking member of the full committee for an opening statement.

But before I do so, we have one of our members, Mr. Mills here, who has his 9 year old Noah, just had a birthday. Do you want to come up and see your dad, and have him tell you happy birthday? All right, we will bring him up here. Yes, give him a gavel, man. Happy birthday, buddy. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Mills. Happy birthday, buddy.

All right, I am now going to recognize Chairman McCaul for any opening statement he wishes to give.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN MICHAEL T. McCAUL

Mr. McCAUL. Thank you, Chairman. I want to thank the witnesses for being here today, and Naz, congratulations on your soon second child, oh boy. This is an oversight hearing. Congressional oversight is a power vested under Article One of the Constitution, we take that very seriously, it is part of our system of checks and balances. It is my duty as chairman of this committee to conduct rigorous oversight of the State Department's activities, and learn how it is spending America's taxpayer's money.

While I have worked in good faith with the State Department on many matters, I have often found the relationship challenging when it comes to obtaining requested information, and that is why I sent a detailed letter over a month ago to you, Deputy Secretary Verma. That letter reiterated problems we've encountered in investigations related primarily to Afghanistan, to facilitating illegal im-

migration through Northern Mexico, to promoting atheism overseas, and other misguided policies.

The 12 page letter received but a single paragraph response. And while I appreciate Secretary Blinken cooperating and working with me to turn over the Afghanistan after action review interview notes, which is very helpful, it is also necessary to talk about some of these other challenges. Secretary Verma, over the course of my investigation, forty-one percent of the documents produced were either heavily redacted or consisted solely of public information available.

Like the eighty-one pages here related to Afghanistan, just heavily redacted, as you can see. In fact, I would say almost one hundred percent redacted, it is not very transparent, and it is not very honest. I mean every one of these eighty pages is blacked out. And I think we can do better, we can work together on this for the American people. Beyond Afghanistan, we all remember what happened regarding the suspended security clearance of Special Envoy to Iran Robert Malley.

The scandal was known at the highest levels of the department, but it was not shared with Congress for more than 2 months, and now it has been over three hundred days since the suspension, and we still really have no answers, no details. And as you know, we had to pass a law to ensure that we are notified of things like this in the future. Additionally, I found the department's lack of transparency and timeliness regarding various arms sales disappointing.

For 2 years the State Department has delayed the approval of export licenses for American companies to sell firearms to both the Mexican military, and law enforcement to fight the drug cartels. In fact, I was down in Mexico City with the secretary of the Navy, and they raised this very issue with me, and the Mexican Marines. Where are the weapons that we paid for, we need them to fight the cartels in Mexico.

They are on the front lines, also trying to keep deadly drugs like fentanyl, not so well I would say, out of the country. In a time of crisis we should not be withholding the tools they need to combat these deadly cartels. And I hope that moving forward, as an eternal optimist, I hope we can consult better with you, and you can consult better with Congress in the future.

It seems to me at the staff level things get bogged down, and I know this happens with Members of Congress and their respective offices, but when I have a higher level discussion, particularly with the secretary, we try to be more like the adults in the room, we actually get progress and we get things done. But I think in fairness to the secretary and myself, we could avoid a lot of these problems if we could just work it out at the staff level.

Without having to go through subpoenas, and then contempt proceedings, and then finally getting the production that we've sought, that we're legally entitled to, and under Article One we are entitled to. That is our responsibility. I know, Naz, you worked on The Hill, and you know that is a responsibility we take very seriously. So, I want to thank the chairman for holding this important hearing, and for the great work you're doing on oversight.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here, and I look forward to hopefully a more productive relationship with both of you, thank you.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Chairman McCaul.

The chair now recognizes Ranking Member Meeks.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER GREGORY
MEEKS**

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Chairman Mast, and Ranking Member Crow, for calling this important hearing. And I want to thank Deputy Secretary Verma, and Assistant Secretary Durakoglu for appearing here today. It is critical that the American people have an understanding of the unprecedented cooperation this committee is receiving from the State Department and its 19 investigations.

As the committee of jurisdiction for the Department of State however, I want to also take a moment, especially in light of the committee's hearing earlier this week assessing the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan, to commend the work of the State Department employees around the world who responded in a heroically way to the unprecedented events unfolding in Afghanistan in 2021.

From the counselors, officers standing side by side their military colleagues at the gates of Hamid Karzai International Airport, or those manning the twenty-four hour task forces in Washington or at embassies abroad. I really want you to know how important your work helping to facilitate the evacuation in record time of one hundred and twenty-four thousand people has not gone unnoticed by me.

I want to thank you and the people of the State Department for all of the work, and dedication, and sacrifices you make on behalf of the United States of America. Now, of course I have a little difference of opinion of my good friend, the chairman of this committee, on what has been happening with reference to transparency. Throughout this Congress, the State Department under Secretary Blinken has exemplified transparency and cooperation.

Engaging extensively with the Foreign Affairs Committee's majority oversight demands. To date, the department has facilitated over 18 witnesses for transcribed interviews, amounting to more than one hundred hours of testimony, and tens of thousands of pages of documents, and over seventy-two productions. I believe this is what compliance looks like.

Additionally, the State Department officials have appeared before the committee on a range of topics, including Afghanistan, council affairs, China, export controls, the global engagement center, and climate change. I also believe this is what compliance looks like. And the few instances where Secretary Blinken has had legitimate concerns about the chilling effect of the majority's request, he has found ways to accommodate our Chairman McCaul.

Again, this is what compliance looks like. Secretary Blinken's compliance is in stark contrast to his immediate predecessor, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who rejected congressional subpoenas issued for him, and for the State Department to provide information and testimony to law makers, including about the firing of the State Department's inspector general. The majority's oversight in-

quiries across committees have yielded no significant findings, no smoking guns to substantiate allegations of misconduct and lack of transparency.

I believe in responsible oversight, because it is critical, it is a critical component of this committee's work. But it is disheartening to witness the continuous diversion of American taxpayer resources and attention toward baseless political motivated investigations. Ironically, the majority's lack of transparency is glaring, and I have continuously called on the majority to release all the transcripts of the closed door interviews conducted during this Congress.

The majority has yet to do so. Now, I appreciate my good friend the chairman's promise to eventually make them public. Yet it has been 15 months of sitting on the facts, and it seems to me, cherry picking quotes to mislead the public. House Republicans have a unique ability to almost immediately release transcripts of transcribed interviews when it suits their political narrative.

But wait months and still not release the transcripts when it doesn't suit their agenda. The political agenda, their political agenda has serious consequences. And publicly releasing the name of an organization advocating for the rights of marginalized people, subjecting them to threats and harassments, is very dangerous. And allowing a disagreement on policy to drive an investigation into a State Department grant supporting freedom of belief is dangerous.

Previously holding hostage the State Department's ability to counter Russian and Chinese disinformation is in fact dangerous. And our duty to the American people is to pursue oversight with integrity and focus on enhancing our national security and governance. The continuous attempts to divide our Nation, to erode our public trust in our institutions, and to distract them from real challenges we face lead us nowhere and must end.

Again, thank you Chairman Mast, Ranking Member Crow, and to our witnesses for your willingness to voluntarily testify in public hearing, I look forward to your insights.

I yield back.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Ranking Member Meeks, I now recognize myself for an opening statement, and I am going to get into the mismanagement of oversight in that.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRMAN BRIAN MAST

Mr. MAST. I will start by framing it in this way, it is often said that quality is better than quantity, and in your written testimony, which you will likely repeat in a moment, you provide stats of being subject to thirty-eight congressional investigations into State Department from the House of Representatives.

Responding to 13 hundred congressional letters, providing forty thousand pages worth of documents, provided testimony in over a hundred hearings, and I thank you for all of that. I thank the State Department for all that you have provided. But unfortunately it is too often quantity and not quality, and I would give you some examples in this as we move along.

We have classified briefers frequently come with little or no answers to our questions, or with absolutely nonsensical analysis. The documents are often just simply not what is requested. When I re-

quested the plan to withdraw from Afghanistan, specifically the circumstances of withdraw that we were going through at that time, I was not sent at all a plan on what we were doing with that withdraw of Afghanistan.

But rather I was sent thousands of pages that generally outlined how we would evacuate from any embassy, which was absolutely not what we were requesting, and that is well known, not how we plan to leave in that moment. This in turn results in additional two, or three, or four, or five requests. So, when you look at the number of how many requests you get for inquiry, it is because your responding to us with something that is not the answer to our original request, essentially making it a dog and pony show.

If you're upset about getting too many inquiries from Congress, it is because the quality of what you are sending us is poor quality. And moreover, the quality of the foreign policy is poor, and that is also why you are getting additional inquiries. That is what requires us to ask so many questions. That is why there are thirty-eight separate investigations from the House of Representatives into the State Department.

Some of the poor policies resulting in many inquiries include these, but would not be limited to these. But these certainly, I think by most people's rationale for common sense, warrant investigation. No. 1, I mentioned it already, the catastrophic withdraw from Afghanistan, with thousands being left behind, and those that are still there.

That warrants investigation, and it warrants inquiries, sorry if that is an inconvenience. Picking 9/11 as an exit date for the withdraw of Afghanistan, that requires inquiries, a request for explanation, and unfortunately we've had request for explanation and witnesses, requests for witnesses go unanswered. Restarting funding to UNRWA after President Trump cut that off, that requires explanation.

Taking the Houthis off of the foreign terrorist organization list requires answers. Having to revoke the Special Representative for Iran Mr. Robert Malley, his security clearance, that requires investigation. Funding drag shows in Ecuador, that requires response from you all. When the State Department goes out there and does that, we deserve answers for why you would fund drag shows in Ecuador with the dollars of we the people.

Building a port in Gaza, or proposing to build a port in Gaza, that requires answers. Giving billions to Iran, giving aid to the Taliban, hiring people at State Department because of their skin color or sexual orientation, when you do that, that requires answers. Flying a rainbow flag over the embassy at the Vatican, that requires answers. When you go out there, and you limit U.S. energy export potential while advancing foreign energy export potential, that requires answers.

Funding LGBTQ activist groups supporting prostitution in Colombia, yes, we want answers to that. When the Ambassador to France is replacing paintings of the founders to replace them with paintings of transgender activists, that requires answers. And treating foreign aid like it is charity instead of a transaction, like sending half a million dollar grants to Nepal to advance atheism, that requires answers.

I want to examine aid to Nepal, to advance atheism there, of half a million dollars, and I apologize, I am going to go over the 5-minutes here, but I will make sure to reciprocate the time to you if you desire it. In April, this is a long list of actions, and you can count on the fact that we're going to get into this in questions, I want to talk about the stonewalling that has taken place.

In April 2021 a notice of funding went out that purports to use American tax dollars to expand atheist networks in the Middle East or South Asia. Then in 2022, June 30, 2022, we sent a letter to State Department requesting information on this grant. Later in 2022 we had not gotten a response, so we sent another letter. Fast forward into the next year, Chairman McCaul sent another letter with questions asking for the production of documents, that would be No. 3.

Then you go later into 2023, HFAC staff emailed the department's staff, your department's staff, to reiterate that its request be attended to expeditiously, that would be attempt No. 4 after several requests had been sent. Move into September 2023, absent any correspondence, documents, or written answers from the department, or even acknowledgment of the other emails, HFAC staff emailed the department requesting an update on the status.

That would be attempt No. 5. Going to later of 2023, absent any correspondence, documents, or written answers from the department, again sent an email and correspondence requesting information. Fast forward into October, your staff emailed HFAC noting that it has now finalized a new production in response to this inquiry, but refused to produce documents until it received an assurance.

Quote "an assurance from HFAC regarding the department's serious concerns that information will be properly protected." I don't know that there should be a proper protection about atheist grants in Nepal, where we should not be allowing the American people to know what is going on, but that was the response. October 19, 2023, HFAC staff emailed department staff requesting State to produce all requested documents and schedule transcribed interviews.

That was contact No. 7. Move on to later in October, State made its first document production 20 October, 2023, first document production. Later HFAC staff emailed department staff acknowledging receipt of the production, but noted that it did not include the documents that we know to be in State Department's possession. That was contact No. 8 on one half a million dollar issue.

Go later, October 27, 2023, department staff called HFAC staff director expressing alarm over transcribed interview requests of career State Department staff in the atheism grant matter. Not sure why that is a problem, but that is what you corresponded with us on. November, department staff emailed HFAC staff stating that it would immediately get to work on providing detailed answers to our questions.

Contact No. 9, we emailed you all noting that we have already submitted questions that have never been answered. Go on to a couple last contacts here. November 15 of 2023, department staff emailed HFAC staff noting that the answers are being drafted and reviewed to provide information. November 16 of 2023, HFAC staff

emailed noting that today is the deadline, and we cannot extend that deadline, and we still haven't received the information.

That was contact No. 10. And November 28, 2023, State failed to send proposed dates for transcribed interviews of these senior bureau officials. That is one example of one grant for half a million dollars that I think most people would agree is absolutely a ridiculous use of the moneys of we the people of the United States of America. Many of our questions did not get answered until this actually took place.

The questions didn't get answered until HFAC staff were actually in Nepal, and while in Nepal, sought out the answers. It should not be faster to get answers from Kathmandu than from just down the road in Foggy Bottom. We expect better from the State Department, and we expect to hear specific answers from you on how you plan to do better starting immediately. In that, I apologize for going over my time.

I now recognize Ranking Member Crow for any opening statement that you may have.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SUBCOMMITTEE RANKING MEMBER JASON CROW

Mr. T4 Crow. Thank you, Chairman Mast, thank you for calling this important hearing. And I appreciate the opportunity to look holistically at the department's responsiveness to congressional oversight over the course of this Congress. As the ranking member of the Oversight Subcommittee I have tracked these investigations closely, and I am thankful to Secretary Blinken and to the department for their cooperation, and for their respect for Congress' constitutional oversight role.

I believe the department's track record demonstrates their compliance, and shows that they have made good faith effort to meet the majority's many, many requests. But there are differences between a good faith oversight effort, of which we have an obligation to pursue, in which you start with a question. The way investigations are supposed to happen is you start with a question.

Then you collect evidence, you hold hearings and briefings, you collect evidence, and you look at documents, and then you come to a conclusion based on that investigation. Versus in these instances where the majority starts with an answer, something that they want to show. And then they work backward from there to try jam the facts in to meet their narrative.

But the good news is, is we have facts, and I love facts, because they show really interesting things. There are 19 investigations that this committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee under the majority control, has initiated this Congress. Twelve of those are deemed active. There have been seventy-two productions of documents and information in response to those investigations.

When we printed this board, there were twenty-two thousand pages, but because you continue to comply and do things on a rolling basis, as of today there are over twenty-four thousand pages of documents now provided to this committee. Eighteen witnesses for transcribed interviews, and over one hundred hours of testimony. That is a lot, and I can also say that has been told to me by the State Department, there have been over fifty thousand staff hours

spent by staff of the State Department responding to the inquiries of this committee.

But the chairman is also right that quality is important too. Right? It is not just the quantity, but also what is being provided. And he used an example, he said we asked for information about the withdrawal of Afghanistan, and what we got was policies pertaining to embassies and withdrawals. Well folks, we have policies in the U.S. Government, and procedures that apply to our government.

We're military folks by background, and there are standard operating procedures that we're familiar with in our military background that apply in every given instance. So, to say that producing those policies is non-compliance is absurd, to be generous. The administration has accommodated every request for transcribed interviews in the investigation into the Afghanistan withdrawal and provided more than 16 thousand pages of documents just for that one investigation. The administration has also gone to great lengths to meet unprecedented requests that implicate really serious concerns of whistleblower protections, chilling effect including coming up with a new process to share with this committee the Dissent Cable Channel and interview notes related to the after action review of the Afghanistan withdrawal.

Recognizing the importance of this investigation, and going to great lengths to accommodate the requests of this committee. In those instances the department clearly communicated their concerns, and Secretary Blinken made extraordinary accommodations. But rather than a transparent and serious investigation, this committee itself actually has not been transparent on many occasions.

Has not released the transcripts of the many transcribed interviews that we have conducted, which we have repeatedly asked for. We have nothing to hide, the administration has nothing to hide. So, let's produce the transcripts, because the American people deserve to have these answers too. But here is fundamentally what is happening here.

The majority disagrees with the policies of this administration. That is the way it works. There are elections in America, people win those elections and implement their policies. So, a policy disagreement does not equal obstruction. A policy disagreement does not equal non-compliance. You can disagree, and we're supposed to have debates about these policies and these programs, let's have those debates.

But do not say that there is obstruction, that they are not working with us in good faith, because they have over and over again proven their willingness to do this. And with all due respect for the chairman, who is my brother in arms, and a fellow combat veteran, in his parade of horrors, one of which he spent a lot of time on was this atheism, this supposed atheism grant that the State Department administered.

Well, here is the fact folks. This grant promotes fundamental rights of freedom of religion. And guess where this grant comes from, it is a grant program that is in direct response to a statutory amendment by, wait for it, a Republican member of this committee that created this program. Facts matter. I look forward to having a fact based discussion in this hearing, and I appreciate the wit-

nesses for coming forward to answer yet another series of questions by the majority.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Ranking Member Crow. We will now go to the individuals for your opening statements. First we have Hon. Richard Verma, deputy secretary of State for management and resources. Next we have Hon. Naz Durakoglu, who is the assistant secretary of the Bureau of Legislative Affairs, which is commonly referred to as H.

Thank you both for being here today, your full statements will be made a part of the record, and I will ask that you keep your spoken remarks to 5 minutes in order to allow time for member questions.

I now recognize Deputy Secretary Verma for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD VERMA, DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE FOR MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCES

Mr. VERMA. Mr. Chairman, thank you so much. Chairman McCaul, Chairman Mast, Ranking Member Meeks, Ranking Member Crow, and members of the committee, I am honored to testify before you today regarding State Department compliance with congressional oversight. I am joined by our assistant secretary of State for legislative affairs, Naz Durakoglu, who many of you know well, and who previously served as a staff member of this committee.

I am proud to say that both the assistant secretary and I have roots on Capitol Hill, where we served for many years. In fact, I started working in this chamber when I was 18 years old for the then chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, Jack Murtha, and I continued working for him through college and law school.

There was no better training on the critical bipartisan role that Congress plays in the shaping and oversight of U.S. national security and foreign policy. I went on to serve in the Air Force, and in the Senate as the national security advisor to the senate leader for many years, and then as the assistant secretary of State for legislative affairs.

The assistant secretary and I have enormous respect and deep appreciation for the role that this committee plays in supporting the department, and our nearly eighty thousand State Department personnel spread in every corner of the world, and every conflict zone. Our U.S. direct hire workforce comes from every State in the country, and nearly 20 percent of our workforce are veterans.

My role as deputy secretary of State for management and resources, or DMR as the position is known, has been described as the chief operating officer for the State Department. Next week will be 1 year on the job for me. It has been an enormous honor to return to the department after serving as the assistant secretary, and as U.S. Ambassador to India.

In this first year I have been to over thirty of our embassies and consulates around the world. From Kyiv, to Baghdad, Jakarta, Sydney, Bogota, Jerusalem, the Western Indian Ocean Islands, and so many places in between. Ours is a department facing an unprecedented set of strategic challenges from the war in Ukraine to con-

flict in the Middle East, to the challenge posed by the People's Republic of China.

Not to mention the transnational challenges brought on by climate change, health and food insecurity, democratic retrenchment, cyber risks, and of course migration. Our personnel are working in more places on a wider range of issues, issues of urgent importance to the American people, than ever before. This is the nature of the global picture we face.

But what I have also discovered in my travels, and my engagements with the workforce, is a deeply committed and inspired team who are putting mission above all else. I know many of you on this committee engage with them too on your travels, and I am sure you've seen the same, and we are grateful for your support.

The global landscape puts into perspective the urgency of our jobs, the need to support our people in their missions, and the need to work closely with all of you on policy development, on oversight, and on appropriations. And I am pleased to be able to say that under Secretary Blinken, and with the leadership from the assistant secretary, the department has reached record levels of engagement with Capitol Hill.

Since the beginning of the 118th Congress, department officials have provided more than thirty-five hundred briefings to Members of Congress and their staffs, testified in more than a hundred congressional hearings, responded to more than 13 hundred congressional letters, and facilitated more than six hundred and fifty CODELs and STAFFDELS.

And while these numbers are impressive, our relationship with Congress is more than just hearings and briefings. We have particularly demonstrated that commitment in our response to congressional oversight. By our count, Mr. Chairman, there were actually forty-five investigations by the House, there are some thirty-four that are ongoing today, of the department, 19 from this committee alone.

This is on top of the many staff level or more informal requests for information we receive on a daily basis. In response, the department has produced nearly forty-two thousand pages of documents to Congress since January 2023. Of that number, more than half has gone to this committee. The department has also made 18 employees available for transcribed interviews with this committee staff with each interview lasting as long as eight or 9 hours, and two more are scheduled.

However, global threats and foreign policy challenges do not cease when we are responding to congressional oversight. The same officers who are subject matter experts also have to review every document that gets produced to the committee, and they take that responsibility quite seriously. And while we've increased our staffing for congressional oversight, the department's primary function must remain the conduct of American foreign policy.

I am grateful for the open channels of communication we've had with all of you, and I am hoping we can find the right balance in the months ahead. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Richard Verma follows:]

Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources
Richard R. Verma's Testimony
"Assessing State Department Compliance with Oversight"
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight & Accountability
March 21, 2024

Chairman McCaul, Chairman Mast, Ranking Member Meeks, Ranking Member Crow, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to testify before you today regarding State Department compliance with congressional oversight.

I am joined by our Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs, Naz Durakoglu, who many of you know well and who previously served as a staff member of this committee.

I am proud to say that both the Assistant Secretary and I have roots on Capitol Hill, where we served for many years advising Members in the House and Senate on matters of national security. In fact, I started working in this chamber when I was 18 years old for the then Chairman of the Defense Appropriations subcommittee, Jack Murtha, and continued working for him through college and law school. There was no better training on the critical bipartisan role that Congress plays in the shaping and oversight of US national security and foreign policy.

I went on to serve in the Air Force and in the Senate as the National Security Advisor to the Senate Majority Leader for many years, and then as the Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs at the State Department during the Obama Administration.

Assistant Secretary Durakoglu and I have enormous respect and deep appreciation for the role that the House Foreign Affairs Committee plays in supporting the Department and our nearly 80,000 State Department personnel spread in every corner of the world, and every conflict zone. Our US direct hire workforce comes from every state in the country and nearly 20% are veterans.

My role as Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources, or “D-MR” as the position is known in Foggy Bottom, has been described as the chief operating officer for the State Department.

I have broad responsibilities for oversight and management of State Department operations, including the Department’s budget, foreign assistance programs, diplomatic missions, and our support to American citizens overseas. Next week will be one year on the job. It’s been an enormous honor to return to the Department after serving as the Assistant Secretary and as US Ambassador to India. In this first year, I’ve been to over 30 of our embassies and consulates around the world....from Kyiv to Baghdad, Jakarta, Sydney, Bogota, Jerusalem, the Western Indian Ocean islands, and so many places in between.

Ours is a Department facing an unprecedented set of strategic challenges from the war in Ukraine, to conflict in the Middle East, to the challenge posed by the People’s Republic of China, not to mention the transnational challenges brought on by climate change, health and food insecurity, democratic retrenchment, cyber risks, and of course, migration.

Our personnel are working in more places on a wider range of issues – issues of urgent importance to the American people – than ever before. This is the nature of the global picture we face. But what I’ve discovered in my travels and engagements with the workforce is a deeply committed and inspired team, putting mission above all else. I know many of you engage with them too on your travels, and I’m sure you’ve seen the same. We are so grateful for your support.

The global landscape puts into perspective the urgency of our jobs, the need to support our people in their missions, and the need to work closely with all of you on policy development, on oversight, and on appropriations.

I’m pleased to be able to say that under Secretary Blinken and with leadership from Assistant Secretary Durakoglu, the Department has reached record levels of engagement with Capitol Hill.

Since the beginning of the 118th Congress, Department officials have:

- Provided more than 3,500 briefings to Members of Congress and their staffs (of which, more than 1,700 for the House);

- Testified in more than 100 congressional hearings;
- Responded to more than 1,300 congressional letters; and,
- Facilitated more than 650 CODELs and STAFFDELs (of which, more than 280 were from the House).

While these numbers are impressive, our relationship with Congress is more than just hearings and briefings. We have particularly demonstrated that commitment in our response to congressional oversight. Over the past year, the Department has received and responded to an unprecedented number of oversight inquiries from Congress.

By our count, there are some 38 unique House of Representatives ongoing investigations of the State Department, 19 from this committee alone. This is on top of the many staff-level or more informal requests for information we receive on a daily basis.

In response, the Department has produced nearly 40,000 pages worth of documents to Congress since January 2023. Of that number, more than half has gone to you. The Department has also made 18 employees available for transcribed interviews with this committee's staff, with each interview lasting as long as eight or nine hours.

However, global threats and foreign policy challenges do not cease to exist when we are responding to congressional oversight. The officers who are subject matter experts making policy recommendations and engaging in diplomacy are the same individuals who must also review every single document that is produced to Congress. And they take that responsibility quite seriously, as do we.

Transcribed interviews, threats of subpoenas, and public disclosure of sensitive information all risk damaging morale among our nonpartisan career civil and foreign service officers. And in some cases, such disclosures can even risk the physical safety of our dedicated partners.

While we have increased our staffing to respond to congressional oversight, the Department's primary function must remain the conduct of American foreign policy. I'm grateful for the open channels of communication we've had with all of you, and I'm hoping we can find the right balance in the months ahead – a

balance that helps fulfil your duties to the House and to your constituents, and one that helps the Department continue to support, defend, and protect US interests and Americans around the world.

In closing, I did want to emphasize that it is one of my core duties as D-MR to ensure responsible management and spending of hard-earned taxpayer dollars.

Given that foreign aid only makes up one percent of the annual federal budget, we are particularly focused on stretching each dollar to its maximum effect.

As we announced earlier this month, the President's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request includes \$58.8 billion for the State Department and USAID. This is \$718 million (1%) above FY 2023.

Like any business, the Department relies on predictable funding streams for proper planning and operations, and we are grateful for Congress's partnership in resourcing the Department to meet the many challenges we face today. Congress's action in the coming days and weeks on our FY 2024 funding will be critical.

I'd also like to strongly reaffirm the importance of the House taking up the supplemental appropriations bill that passed the Senate with significant bipartisan support.

I know many Members of this Committee have spoken out in support of urgently needed funding for Ukraine, the Middle East, the Indo-Pacific, and global humanitarian crises. We deeply appreciate your leadership and support.

Thank you again for inviting us to testify, and we look forward to your questions.

End

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Mr. Verma. I ask unanimous consent that the following member be allowed to sit on the dais and participate in today's hearing, the gentlewoman from Texas, Ms. Van Duyne. Without objection, so ordered. All right, we're now going to move to member questions, thank you for your opening statement. I understand that you will not be doing one, Ms. Durakoglu, that is correct? Okay.

We're going to move to Mr. Perry, No. 1, for 5 minutes, you are recognized.

Mr. PERRY. All right, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I didn't intend to head this direction, but I at least will for a moment. I appreciate, first of all, let me say thank you for your service, and Secretary Verma, particularly in uniform, as there is some other formerly uniform service members here as well, but it is not just about quantity, it is about quality.

I am looking at these documents, and it is a pretty thick stack of documents, but now you both have pretty high education here as I looked at your resume. Can either of you read anything on this page? Or this page? Or this page? Or any of these pages that all look the same? That came from you folks to us. Now, I know it is probably a lot of work providing all this information to us.

You worked here on The Hill, both of you did before at some point in your career, and you know it is our job to do this. And while we do have policy disagreements, and they are to be expected based upon the outcome of elections, we need the information so that we can do our job, because even though the executive branch is making these decisions on executing the law, we're the ones that make the law, as you know that, and we need to make sure that the law is being executed as designed.

That having been said, I want to ask you folks about Robert Malley. I think it has been about three hundred days, the chairman of the full committee mentioned it. It is my understanding that he is under investigation, and that he has had his security clearance revoked—correction, suspended. Will either one of you speak to that? Is the investigation still ongoing, has his security clearance been revoked, what level of security clearance are we talking about that he has maintained?

Is there a designator with that, is there SCI, is there L, is there Q, is there weight, where do we stand?

Mr. VERMA. Yes, Congressman, I will say the matter is still under review. There is not a lot we can say in this public setting. Frankly, I don't have the information to share with you because it is under review. And I am hoping we can get to a point where we can actually provide you with more information, but as long as it is under review, there isn't a lot to provide to you. And I think you have it basically right, the security clearance is pending adjudication—

Mr. PERRY. So, Mr. Secretary, you're an attorney, right? And I think I read that, you're an attorney, you're familiar with the Supreme Court, you know that they've held that even ongoing law enforcement cases cannot limit the committee's power to conduct its own inquiries, and I can give you the case, I am sure you're familiar. But it seems like it is limiting our ability right now, because you won't tell—so, do you know what level clearance he had?

Mr. VERMA. I don't know what level of clearance he had.

Mr. PERRY. You don't know which level, were all levels suspended, or just—how familiar are you with the case? And if you're not familiar, should you be as the deputy secretary?

Mr. VERMA. No, what happens, and Congressman, what I understand is that the under secretary for management, and the citizen secretary for diplomatic security actually came up in closed session and did brief the chairman and ranking member. Because of privacy restrictions, because of the law that you cite, we were able to provide some details, but we can't do it in open session.

So, we provided some administrative details. Again, probably not enough to satisfy you or the committee members today, and I understand your concern, but that is the limitations we're operating under.

Mr. PERRY. So, there are other members on the committee here that have the same level of security clearance, is there a commitment from your office—we don't want to take you away from your work, but we need to know this information. Understanding, and maybe the public doesn't know, but we're talking about someone who I think can potentially be credibly accused of assisting and aiding the enemy of the United States of American in Iran.

Having regular contact, and so on, and so forth, would you commit to a closed door setting, a closed session with the other members of this committee for that information?

Mr. VERMA. Yes, let me say two things. One, I'd be careful about just jumping to conclusions like that—

Mr. PERRY. I am not jumping to any conclusions, sir, I can read.

Mr. VERMA. Well, I think you are. And second, I'd be happy to take that back and provide you with whatever administrative information we can, and consistent with what the law allows us. But yes, let me take it back.

Mr. PERRY. So, can you tell us what the circumstances were, how the department became aware of the allegations surrounding Mr. Malley?

Mr. VERMA. I actually don't have that information, Congressman. I will say, I understand we have offered a full committee briefing, and so that offer stands.

Mr. PERRY. And we want more than just your administrative details, sir, it has been three hundred days plus.

Mr. VERMA. Congressman, we will do whatever we are able to do given the pending nature of the investigation.

Mr. PERRY. All right, Mr. Chairman, time has expired, thank you.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Mr. Perry.

The chair now recognizes Ranking Member Crow.

Mr. CROW. Thank you, Chairman. Mr. Verma, just picking up where we left off there with the last line of questioning, it is true that the State Department has actually provided information to this committee on this issue, this security clearance issue regarding Mr. Malley, is that correct?

Mr. VERMA. That is correct.

Mr. CROW. Including a classified briefing with members, is that correct?

Mr. VERMA. That is correct.

Mr. CROW. In which all of the information available to the department at that time that they can release, with the restrictions of a personnel issue, because there are human resources protections about what can be transmitted during the pendency of an ongoing investigation, but notwithstanding those restrictions, you have let us know what you all know?

Mr. VERMA. That is correct.

Mr. CROW. Thank you. Ms. Durakoglu, I want to talk to you about Afghanistan for a minute, because you have been at the department for a while, and you saw first-hand the issues of Afghanistan around the withdrawal, and I was tasked with essentially receiving input from congressional offices, and I have to say the input was quite heavy. There were a lot of folks seeking assistance at the time. I happened to, for outside reasons, found myself in Turkey at the time, so I was actually closer to the time zone in Afghanistan.

Ms. DURAKOGLU. Sure, thank you, Congressman, and thank you for your service as well. You're right, I was at the department during the withdrawal, and I was tasked with essentially receiving input from congressional offices, and I have to say the input was quite heavy. There were a lot of folks seeking assistance at the time. I happened to, for outside reasons, found myself in Turkey at the time, so I was actually closer to the time zone in Afghanistan.

So, the role that I ended up playing was calling up our officers on the ground, and getting information from them about which gates were open, what was going on that day, so that I can then transmit it to Congress. I was in touch with the staff directors of this committee and others quite regularly. And the one thing I can say is I wasn't on the ground, I have immense respect for those both at DOD and State Department who were.

When I regularly spoke to officers who actually were personal contacts of mine from my time in Congress, I would hear gun shots in the background, I would hear screaming. They would talk to me through it, they would actually try to locate individuals that certain Congressmen and women were looking for. And often times the cell phone that they were using, they would pass right to the marines that they were working with side by side as well.

So, I will say it was a very difficult time, I think for all of us, including those on this committee. But I have to say the department was really doing everything it could, and I have immense respect, particularly for those who volunteered to go to Kabul.

Mr. CROW. Yes, thank you for that. And I mentioned in my opening, this issue of some unprecedented requests, and the department making accommodation on those. Can you talk about, for example, the Dissent Channel cable issue, and how that came about, and some of the substantial accommodations the department made in responding to that request?

Ms. DURAKOGLU. Sure. So, as you know, Secretary Blinken was actually before this committee, and he explained it himself. But there are obviously extreme sensitivities to sharing the Dissent Channel Cable, this is a confidential channel directly to the secretary. The employees who participate on this, on whatever issue they participate in, they expect it to remain confidential for the most part.

So, when the request came in for the Dissent Channel, and I will say the dissent actually originally was from democrats on the committee back when they were in the majority, we talked to the committee about providing briefings. And this was even before 2023, there were briefings provided. And then post 2023 we provided a summary of the Dissent Channel Cable, which actually took direct input from that cable.

We had our professionals who know about the Dissent Channel come up here, and in a closed setting, discuss what the input is, answer any questions, and then eventually we did provide it in camera as well. And this was, I would say, an extraordinary accommodation that has never actually been done before in the history of the State Department.

Mr. CROW. Thank you. And in the time that we have, it is my understanding that the Senate minority, the Republicans in the Senate are actually holding up some Ambassador appointments based on investigations that the majority in the House are conducting on certain issues based on policy disagreements. Can you just talk to me very briefly about that, and some instances of those important appointments being held up?

Ms. DURAKOGLU. I have to think a little bit through this, but I can say one person who is notably absent today is our legal advisor, who obviously the L Bureau plays a big role in accommodations, and the oversight process as well. The department hasn't had a legal advisor since the beginning of this administration, which is quite extraordinary. Our first nominee had to withdraw, and we have a second nominee who recently had her hearing, and was voted out yesterday.

But I will say it was against the will of the minority, and she will be on the floor. This is someone who plays a big role, I will say Ecuador was mentioned a few times, we don't have our nominee to Ecuador. Moving forward, we also talked, I don't know if we mentioned it, but I know a major focus of this committee is the Bureau of Democracy Rights and Labor.

The administration has gone without an assistant secretary for that bureau since the beginning as well. Also we had a nominee who was forced to withdraw, actually forced not to proceed, and we now have a second one too, who we're hoping to lead the bureau. But I will say across the board we have just dozens of folks who are waiting, mostly career officials. And I don't know if the deputy secretary would like to comment on that.

Mr. VERMA. It is just hard to carry out the mission that I think this committee wants us to carry out when we don't have our chief of mission in Djibouti, and Nigeria, The African Union, and Ecuador. In Haiti we didn't have an ambassador until we had to have a cloture vote on the Senate floor. I know this isn't your challenge, and it is the other chamber.

But when you are frustrated with the department, and our inability to really move big policy initiatives or protect people, we've got to get our people out in the field. And this really should be a bipartisan concern. You look at every commission after every crisis in the United States, 9-11 Commission forward, they talk about getting our people out in the field as quickly as possible.

Including in the after action review for Afghanistan, they talked about the absence of Senate confirmed people in top jobs. So, I think as a bipartisan matter, I hope we can look at this, a bicameral matter frankly, because it impacts U.S. national security.

Mr. CROW. Thank you.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Ranking Member Crow. I would say I think what makes it most difficult, bad policy is difficult to defend. And I would say that I am glad you spoke about Afghanistan, it does matter to have answers to your questions in a timely way. The withdraw being in August, I was here in this room asking questions in March prior to the withdraw, and I asked three very specific questions.

How many SIVs were they anticipating, how many when you count each of their family members, and how many staff did State Department have working on that? State did not have the answer, State promised to get us the answer, never got us the answer. And we know that right now to this moment there was no attempt to get that answer for us, and people are still running for their lives.

That is the result of what happens when you all don't get us the answer. That is not a question right now, Mr. Verma, I will have my time to ask questions.

Right now I am going to recognize Mr. Mills for 5 minutes.

Mr. MILLS. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you both for being here, I really appreciate it. Deputy Secretary Verma, great to meet you in person, we've exchanged some phone calls and texts. One of the things that one of my colleagues, and also my fellow brother in combat arms, Mr. Crow, has said is that start with a question, get the facts. So, I am going to start with a question.

In August 2021, President Biden made a comment and said that if you just show your blue passport at HKIA, that you'll be permitted to enter, and allowed on the aircraft. Is that correct?

Mr. VERMA. Well, I think you know, Congressman, what was happening in August 2021 at that airport, and how dangerous it was, and we were——

Mr. MILLS. Deputy Secretary, we are not debating at all, I completely agree with you that it was chaotic. I completely agree with you, I just want to know——

Mr. VERMA. Right, so we got out one hundred——

Mr. MILLS. I just want to know did he make that statement?

Mr. VERMA. We got out one hundred and twenty-four thousand people——

Mr. MILLS. Did he make that statement?

Mr. VERMA. Including six thousand Americans. And the ability to show a blue passport was very challenging——

Mr. MILLS. Deputy Secretary, this is how things get taken out of context and start getting heated up. It is just a simple yes or no. Did President Biden make that comment or not?

Mr. VERMA. I don't know, I wasn't at the department at the time, frankly, and——

Mr. MILLS. Do you happen to remember, because he made it clear if you're a blue passport holder, and you show your passport at the gate, that you'd be permitted to enter. That was in a direct quote.

Ms. DURAKOGLU. Sir, my apologies, we were taking a lot of intake at that time, I actually don't remember the president's comments on that. I do know——

Mr. MILLS. Understood. Well, he did actually make that comment, and if you will, can you just roll a piece of video first? Because that starts with my question, now let's get to the fact. It is actually going to be the one on Afghanistan. You guys don't have that one, OK. There was blue passport holders sitting outside on August 26 of 2021——

Mr. MAST. Mr. Mills, will you pause for a moment? We can pause the time. Do we have whatever video you want? We can check for that.

Mr. MILLS. Do we have that on the videos?

Mr. MAST. Just pause his time for a moment.

Mr. MILLS. I don't think they brought that one in, unfortunately.

Mr. MAST. No, are you sure? Okay.

Mr. MILLS. Too many actual videos to be entered into record. But I would request to be entered into the record, Mr. Chairman——

Mr. MAST. So ordered.

Mr. MILLS. The video of Americans waving their passport August 26 of 2021 outside of the Abbey Gate, not being permitted entry. And subsequently losing their lives, and being blown into the canal.

Mr. MILLS. So, I am going to go ahead and continue on. We talk about facts all the time, we talk about what actually took place, and what occurred. Secretary Verma and I have actually discussed the idea that we have a policy and a budgeting issue when it comes to being responsive to Americans that are abroad. But I want to figure out how it is that private citizens and others are able to do things that the whole of government in its entire is unsuccessful in being able to do.

I want to provide a couple of examples. So, here is the first one, which is a mother and three children, born and raised Amarillo, Texas natives that Congressman Ronny Jackson out of Texas 13 had requested State Department assistance and support for. And as a rear admiral, had requested support from the Department of Defense, and was denied, and not even given any ability to try and get this family into the HKIA area when they were sitting at the gate.

And the actual guard said that the only thing the State Department has to do is even say your name over the actual comms, and we will permit you in. Task Force Afghanistan said that we cannot provide that level of assistance, to say their name. But that is OK, after 11 days, and multiple attempts by the State Department and others to thwart our efforts, which we came to find, that is that family successfully rescued by myself and my team.

Now, let's look at other examples of this. In October 7 we had the barbaric and horrendous incidents in Israel. We requested support from the U.S. State Department to help to get charter aircrafts in even after Germany, the Philippines, and other nations had come in and successfully arranged that through Ben Gurion Airport, yet where was the U.S. State Department?

Well, I can tell you where I was. On October 11, I pulled out the first thirty-two Americans, October 12, I pulled out the next forty-

five Americans. Going into Nazareth, Haifa, going into Jerusalem, going into the West Bank, going into other areas of Israel. Getting out two hundred and fifty-five before the State Department in all of its might and all of its finances even got a single charter aircraft.

Now, let's go to one more recent incident and example. The spokesperson, Mr. Miller, of the U.S. State Department made a comment about Haiti and its current disheveled capability of Jimmy Cherizier, which is known as Barbeque, taking over Mankin Khan (phonetic) G9, and the rest of the actual gangs who have terrorized, and set fire, and cannibalized individuals.

When requesting support, the spokesman for the State Department said we have no plan and or intent to help evacuate and secure Americans. Well, at my own dime and expense once again, here we go. And here is an example we will go ahead and play of what that looks like.

[Video shown.]

Mr. MILLS. These are Americans who had requested multiple times from the U.S. State Department to gain assistance, to be able to get them from their actual orphanage, to include the gentleman Mitch Albom, a very well-known author and radio host, who by the way is a known and well registered Democrat. You see, when we care about the safety and security of Americans, we don't look at political affiliations, or gender, or race, or religion, or other things which are an other descript.

We care that they are a blue passport holder, and that is supposed to matter. We went on to not only rescue them, but to also rescue 13 more after that. To include a 2-month old baby, and a 3-year old little girl who had been hiding, and locking themselves in a chapel. Now, I am puzzled at how the President of the United States and the United States DOS is telling us that they don't have the ability to help and rescue these Americans.

When private resources with limited resources can achieve these great feats, and there is other organizations who are doing amazing things. So, we can't talk about how the State Department's main objective abroad is to help support, and to rescue, and to help those abroad in every way, because we've seen time and time again the failures that have occurred.

We see this through the multitude of NEOs that are occurring, through the failed domestic and foreign policies that is leading up to this, to the Americans that are being abandoned. There is a pattern of abandonment that is existing right now, and no confidence in our own government, which is why Americans feel more secure calling private companies than they do actually responding to the U.S. State Department, who does what?

Sends them an automatic email and a website, please go ahead and fill out. But guess what? The good thing is that you do get shamed into your jobs. Because now all of a sudden you had no purpose or no plan to rescue Americans, now you're sending a charter. That is what it takes to get the State Department to do their jobs, and that is unacceptable. So, you need to let us know the resources, assets, and what needs to be done, because we're willing to help that, but we get nothing from you in return.

With that, I yield back, and thank you for indulging my questions, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Mr. Mills.

The chair now recognizes Ms. Titus.

Mr. VERMA. Mr. Chairman, can I respond to that, or?

Mr. MAST. Certainly, you may.

Mr. VERMA. Look, over the past 12 months State Department has helped seventy thousand Americans. Seventy thousand around the world. Not one or two, or nine, or ten, seventy thousand. We evacuated 12 hundred people——

Mr. MILLS. Are you alluding that the one or two's lives don't matter?

Mr. VERMA. No, I am giving you the quantity and scale of what we've done.

Mr. MILLS. Okay.

Mr. VERMA. We took out 12 hundred people from Sudan at great risk. Our consulars, officers——

Mr. MILLS. I actually commended you on Sudan, do you remember this?

Mr. MAST. Mr. Verma is currently recognized.

Mr. VERMA. I didn't see that, I appreciate that. We took out thousands of people, offered up thousands of seats on chartered aircraft from Israel. We are taking people out of Haiti. I appreciate what you've done, Congressman. But I think to demean the department the way you do, I think doesn't reflect the reality.

Mr. MILLS. But it is not demeaning, it is providing facts. Isn't that what Mr. Crow had just talked about, was putting the question, and getting facts?

Mr. VERMA. These people——

Mr. MILLS. There were people asking and begging for help.

Mr. Mast. Mr. Mills.

Mr. VERMA. These consular officers are doing incredibly heroic work——

Mr. MILLS. I love what the State Department is doing, I admire them.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Verma and Mr. Mills, hold on a minute. Mr. Mills, I am happy to do a second round if you have more questions. Mr. Verma, you can continue.

Mr. VERMA. Look, I'd love to work with you. The budget that you all passed out of here last fall was a twenty-five percent cut to the State Department, twenty-five percent cut while you were asking us to take on evacuation responsibilities of Americans. We do so much to warn Americans where they are going. Haiti has been a level four country where we actually tell people not only not to go, but if you go our ability to get you out is going to be limited.

So, I am looking forward to this conversation with you. I hope we can support the budget to allow us to do things in a more robust way.

Mr. MAST. Ms. Titus, you are recognized.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to go back to the subject of the investigations that we were mentioning earlier so that the public knows exactly what the Republicans on this committee want to be investigating. Department grant support for at risk members of the LGTBQ community in Latin America, and as was pointed out, this investigation derailed the implementation of

this grant after grantees were publicly targeted by members of the House who had voted for the assistance in the first place.

That is sending some mixed signals, I would say, by the people across the aisle. The majority is also investigating the State Department for following a law that was passed in 2016 that directs you to support advocates for religious freedom, and now the majority is threatening these partners with subpoenas if they don't sit for transcribed interviews. Again, a law passed in 2016, you're doing what the law said, religious freedom. Surely they support religious freedom.

The majority has also opened an investigation that has been weaponized against diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. They refuse to acknowledge that diversity is one of our strengths, that perhaps we should allow people with disabilities greater access. I can't believe they want to come out opposed to that, but that is the tenor of things in their investigations.

They refuse to acknowledge that this is a good thing, as opposed to something that they want to get rid of, equity, inclusion, and diversity. They've also held so many hearings on Afghanistan, one this week, and one today, this hearing is kind of devolving into that, there has been no new information, no smoking gun after all of these hearings.

There are 11 other investigations that they are pursuing at the expense of our time and the public's taxpayer dollars that range from the Wuhan Institute to John Kerry, they want to investigate John Kerry now. In response, I just want to say this again, even though it has been already pointed out. The State Department has turned over twenty-four thousand pages of documents.

Produced 18 witnesses for transcribed interviews. One hundred hours of testimony. Twenty-three closed door interviews which we can't get access to. That is all in—I think you said fifty thousand staff hours, all in response to these requests for investigations. You mentioned the cutting of the budget last time. Well, this time, in the budget that has just come out, or the bill that we're going to be considering, there is another 6 percent cut to the State Department.

How they expect you to do all of this, and deal with international diplomacy at the same time is beyond me, and now they want to cut 6 percent from the budget. And what do they have to show for it? Absolutely nothing. We've not seen any transcripts, we haven't heard the closed door interviews, there are no new facts, no new damning substance that has been uncovered.

It is just more performative politics. And in true to their fashion, the way they've been operating, if you can't find a smoking gun, then you just blow smoke, and that is what we've been hearing. So, just to put all that out there again, don't hesitate to make that a part of the record because that is what is going on here. But I want to talk specifically about the Global Engagement Center.

Again, that is something that is under investigation by this committee, not a surprise. I'd like to ask unanimous consent too, to put this article in the record. It was in the Washington Post opinion, "Don't Defund the Fight Against Russia and China's Disinformation."

[The information referred to appears in Appendix]

Ms. TITUS. You all are probably familiar with that. One of the things that is pointed out in here is that China spends seven billion dollars or more annually. Russia spends about one point five billion dollars annually. And we're having a hard time getting around sixty-one million, million with an M, and their billion with a B. But anyway, according to this article, and to my research, and some of the things that you've had to say, we need this agency. We should not be giving up the battle for misinformation.

This agency is not something that combats disinformation internally, but abroad. And so, I'd like for you all to talk about it, and talk about what the implications are of failing to reauthorize this agency, so that we can stand up for democracy as Russia and China try to conduct this hidden or secret war against us through their sources of disinformation. Would you address that?

Mr. CROW. And before you do so, I wanted to make sure that Ms. Titus' request for entry into record was recognized.

Mr. MAST. Yes, it is.

Mr. CROW. Okay, thank you.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Crow.

Mr. VERMA. Congresswoman, thank you for raising the Global Engagement Center. As you point out, it is a battle in the information space. Our adversaries are not sitting back, they are spending billions of dollars. They are trying to shape the battlefield in the information space, and if we're not there pushing back, if we're not there exposing what they are doing, it not only sets us back, it sets our partners and our allies around the world, and really puts us at risk.

So, we appreciate that the Global Engagement Center has been designated as the point, and the lead for the Federal Government to be out there exposing, and giving people the tools to actually push back. They do absolutely no work in the United States at all, and they do have a sunset clause at the end of this year. I think it is vitally important that the Global Engagement Center also be reauthorized.

Ms. TITUS. I agree with that. And just a simple yes or no so there is no question about it, the Global Engagement Center does not conduct domestic focused programming, is that correct?

Mr. VERMA. They conduct no work in the United States at all.

Ms. TITUS. And in this investigation that they are conducting about the center, have you been forthcoming in letting them know what some of your implementing partners are doing, who they are, and how they are engaged?

Mr. VERMA. One hundred percent.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Ms. Titus.

Ms. TITUS. Okay, is my time up? Seems like my time is a lot shorter than your time. But thank you.

Mr. MAST. I think you're at about a minute fifty over, isn't that about the same?

Ms. TITUS. I yield back.

Mr. MAST. I certainly tried my best to make it as even as I could here, and thank you for your questions. And Mr. Verma, I do know that as we're speaking about the GEC, there were absolutely domestic news outlets that were targeted by GEC resources. So, let's

not pretend as though that didn't happen, that one hundred percent happened.

Mr. VERMA. I don't know if this is a question, because I am happy to respond to it. Because it really was——

Mr. MAST. It is not a question, we already did a hearing on it with people that are experts on it.

Mr. VERMA. It was, I think you're concerned about one of their grantees, but they have strict guidelines——

Mr. MAST. I now recognize Ms. Salazar for her time for questions.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me this time. And thank you, Mr. Verma, for being here, and willingly answer our questions. I just want you to help me with just basically one thing, which is to be able to obtain all communications between the United States Embassy in Cuba, and a small business called MADWOMAN, and I am going to explain to you why.

It occurs that the United States Embassy has hired this company called MADWOMAN that is supposedly in the hands of private sector in Cuba, something that is very difficult to believe, but that is the way they call themselves, the mipymes, small business, Cubans owning their own small businesses. It occurs that the owner of this small business called MADWOMAN fires one of her employees called Alvaro Hernandez.

Just for the mere fact of writing in his own social media, down with the dictatorship. The owner was honored by the State Department, your State Department, as one of the top entrepreneurs of the hemisphere, she is invited to come to Washington. And as I said, she is doing business with the United States Embassy to do some type of marketing on the island.

At the same time this company, MADWOMAN, the offices are in a building which is owned by the Cuban regime, and specifically the military conglomerate. So, that is why I sent a letter to President Biden, and I copied Secretary Blinken so we could understand what is happening between the embassy and MADWOMAN. And the only way we could do that if we could have all communication, emails, texts, phone calls, letters between the embassy and MADWOMAN.

Basically my question is could you commit to give us by April 1, as I asked President Biden and Secretary Blinken to offer that information to us, do you think that you could commit to help me do that?

Mr. VERMA. Sure, Congresswoman, I haven't seen your letter, I am happy to followup with you after this hearing. If you want to give me a copy of the letter, I am happy to take it back and work on it right away.

Ms. SALAZAR. And so, that means that you would be willing to dedicate resources from the State Department, and put some interest in providing to my office all types of communication?

Mr. VERMA. I am happy to dig into this on your behalf, I don't know anything about it, I am sorry.

Ms. SALAZAR. No, I understand that you don't, that is why I am—but you are third in command, you can definitely put some resources that are at your disposal to look more into this, because I sent the letter a few months ago, back in February, and I have not

received any type of response, and it is important. Because I am sure that you don't want anyone to be breaking the law.

There is an embargo against Cuba, we do not want to be spending taxpayer's money on hiring companies that are close to the regime, right? We want to help those Cubans that do want to be part of the free market economy.

Mr. VERMA. Yes. I can commit to you that we will take this, and look into it, and come back to you right away.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you very much, I take your word for it. I yield back.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Ms. Salazar. And I would also point out, because it has been brought up numerous times about the transcribed interviews from Afghanistan, that those have begun to be delivered. And what is being redacted from them is what the minority requested to be redacted from them, that is part of what is taking the time. So, some of them have been delivered already, and they are working to be delivered.

Mr. CROW. Meaning delivered to the minority staff for review—

Mr. MAST. Delivered to the minority staff, that is correct.

Mr. CROW. But not yet released yet.

Mr. MAST. Yes. To say that again in the affirmative, they are being delivered to the minority staff. Some have been delivered already. I am now going to recognize myself for 5 minutes. And I want to start by going to what I spoke about in length in my opening comments. A half a million dollar grant to Nepal regarding the expansion of atheism, and I would just start with this question from senior State Department personnel.

Do you believe that is an appropriate use of half a million dollars of we the people, to expand atheism in Nepal?

Mr. VERMA. Mr. Chairman, I have actually looked at this, I have looked at the grant, I have looked at the materials, that is not what the grant is for, and that is not what the work would be for. And frankly, we would never authorize such a grant to any organization to promote any kind of religion. As the ranking member discussed, this was actually to fulfill a requirement that this committee put forward to defend people who were being persecuted for their beliefs.

Governments across the world, as you know, are cracking down, can torture people, lock people up for their religious beliefs—

Mr. MAST. So, you're saying today that no half a million dollar grant for atheism in Nepal, or divided up in other areas?

Mr. VERMA. I have seen no evidence of any grant to promote atheism in Nepal.

Mr. MAST. Are you familiar with those that you sent to our committee to answer questions about this grant?

Mr. VERMA. I am.

Mr. MAST. Okay, and are you familiar with that they answered one hundred and forty times over that, that they just didn't know, they weren't the decisionmakers on this, they don't know, they don't know, they don't know?

Mr. VERMA. Yes, Mr. Chairman, I think you have to—I will tell you what I have done, I have looked at the materials that this grantee in Nepal has used. It was about supporting civil society in

Nepal so that they could defend themselves if they were persecuted for believing a particular religion.

Mr. MAST. Which religion?

Mr. VERMA. Or frankly, non-religion. It wasn't religion specific, it was frankly agnostic. It was giving people the right to be safe from persecution, which is exactly the intent of the law.

Mr. MAST. Let's go back to the original question. Again, as Senior State Department personnel, would it be appropriate for the State Department to authorize half a million dollar grant of the moneys of we the people of United States of America to promote atheism?

Mr. VERMA. It would not be appropriate to have a grant to promote any religion or non-religion coming from the United States. That is not what the International Religious Freedom Office does. It is not what our Office of Democracy Human Rights and Labor does.

Mr. MAST. Very good. So, Ms. Durakoglu, would you like to respond to that as well? Would it be appropriate to give a half million dollar grant to promote atheism in Nepal?

Ms. DURAKOGLU. No, it would not be, and I concur with the deputy's statements. Could I add a data point to that? You mentioned that the individuals who came up from our Religious Freedom Office were continually saying I don't know on a number of issues. These are, I believe, the same individuals that are being requested for transcribed interviews. To be clear, we are actually offering up the individual who would know, the senior official.

So, just to be clear from earlier statements, we would like to provide the senior official who actually is in charge of this issue, to the committee.

Mr. MAST. We would love for you to provide that, but let's not just talk about senior officials. Do you have a problem with providing individuals that are not senior officials?

Mr. VERMA. It does send a chilling effect, Mr. Chairman, whenever you have grant administrators—

Mr. MAST. Be more specific, chilling effect?

Mr. VERMA. Of, for example, if I am a relatively junior or mid-level person, and I award grants from the Department of State, and I am at risk of being called before a committee, or testifying, or transcribed interviews, it is—and that is why State Departments over respective administrations have had a cutoff of deputy assistant secretary or senior executive service to come up and appear before you.

We are simply carrying on that tradition, I think it is an important one to protect the workforce, frankly to protect the morale, and well being—

Mr. MAST. The workforce works for we the people of the United States of America, and—

Mr. VERMA. Right—

Mr. MAST. I would say absolutely, there should be a chilling effect for anybody that writes a grant to spend any dollars of we the people of the United States of America whether to promote atheism in Nepal, or whether to do a drag show in Ecuador, or promote prostitution in Colombia, or whatever it might be. There should absolutely be a chilling effect for any person at any level that goes out there and conducts their work in such a manner.

Mr. VERMA. Mr. Chairman, I think we have a disagreement about the facts, and I don't—from what I have seen, and what I have reviewed, and the transcripts I have reviewed, and the grant materials of the organization in Nepal, and I have spent a lot of time in and around Nepal, and South Asia, and I know what risk people face, and I think this was exactly the right kind of program to support civil society and protect them from persecution.

Mr. MAST. Back to the point of this hearing, clearly you disagree with this, but I would say certainly you had plenty of time to prepare for that. Given that over the course of 2 years and ten specific requests for information before your department finally responded with anything, it took you quite a long time to come up with the story that you're presenting to me right now.

The other thing that I would say about that is there is a complaint about needing more resources, needing more staff, needing more personnel. Well, imagine if you cut down your work load by ten, by a multiple of ten, how much more manageable it would be if we didn't have to ask you ten times for everything that we want. Whether its correspondence about a Dissent Cable to which you all gave out public awards to people that were a part of the Dissent Cable.

Or whether it is for information about drag show in Ecuador, or grants in Nepal, or anything else. You could cut that down by ten X if you responded with quality on the first time.

Now I will recognize Ms. Van Duyne for her time.

Mr. VERMA. I will say we spent fifty thousand—

Mr. MAST. You're not recognized.

Ms. VAN DUYNE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, good afternoon. I ask for unanimous consent to enter into the record the House Committee on Small Business statement for the record.

[The information referred to was not submitted]

Ms. VAN DUYNE. The House Committee on Small Business' subcommittee on oversight has been investigating the Federal Government's censorship of American small business by proxy since the beginning of this Congress. Our concerns began with a release of the Twitter files. When investigative journalists unearth collusion between the Federal Government, social media companies, exorbitantly wealthy foundations, so-called non-partisan fact checking companies to censor Americans online.

When it was revealed that the State Department, through its Global Engagement Center, I am glad we're talking about that today, funded the Global Disinformation Index, a company that creates black lists of American media organizations, and ranks them by GDI's perceived trustworthiness and risk, the committee took action. The GDI down ranked conservative leaning companies, and bolstered left leaning organizations.

Ironically, including those who are repeatedly guilty of spreading false narratives. By labeling certain companies as risky and untrustworthy based on their political views. The GDI's ranking system interferes with the ability of conservative leaning small businesses to earn revenue through viewership and advertising. This is reflected in the GDI's mission statement, which is to re-

move the financial incentive to create disinformation by issuance of its dynamic exclusion list.

Which is basically a black list disguised by an eloquent name. Advertising platforms were pressured into ending relationships with companies GDI labels as unreliable, thereby demonetizing the disfavored companies, and redirecting money and audiences to the media companies that GDI deems worthy. GDI's CEO herself said the dynamic exclusion list had quote "significant impact on the advertising revenue that has gone to those sites."

Two of the conservative leaning down ranked businesses, The Federalist, and The Daily Wire, which by the way, are American companies, have joined the State of Texas in a lawsuit against State and GEC to stop the government from actively interfering in the news media market, and attempting to render conservative press outlets unprofitable.

The complaint alleges that by funding the infrastructure, the development, marketing, and promotion of censorship technology, the government is covertly suppressing the speech at a segment of the American press with whose narrative they disagree. So, you're not doing it, you're just paying somebody else to do it. Other organizations funded by the GEC have been caught sending lists of accounts to social media companies that they label as purveyors of disinformation in order to have them removed from online platforms.

We now know that American accounts were included in these lists. It is a violation of the GEC's congressional mandate to act against Americans, which you said you're not doing, but we've got proof that you are. They could also not send taxpayer money to third parties to accomplish the censorship they are forbidden from doing themselves. By funding these companies, making it fungible, the GEC is violating the First Amendment by proxy.

The Federal Government cannot circumvent constitutional protections by using private actors to accomplish what the State itself is prohibited from doing. The full extent of the GEC censorship scheme remains unknown, as the GEC has been uncooperative with investigations into where they are sending taxpayer money. Our first letter to State, which asks for information on grants from Fiscal Year 2019 to present was not answered for nearly 6 months.

Even communications with State legislative affairs team on production schedules have been limited. Responses continue to be incomplete, and delayed to this day. The single document that was finally provided in December was a sliver of what was requested. Featuring only cooperative agreements, instead of all of the grants as asked.

It appears from the numerical system that was used for each award that over a hundred cooperative agreements were completely omitted from State's production, and some of the admitted grants are publicly available online. So, it is unclear why State did not comply with our request. Further, information that was available on usaspending.gov was redacted in State's limited production.

These omissions caused the committee to request more information, including the identity of subawardees to see where State's grant recipients were funneling taxpayer money. When that response also went unanswered, the committee asked for a briefing

from a State grant officer to better understand the GEC's grant issuance and oversight process.

This is also pertinent to the committee's investigation given that State inspector general found that the GEC lacked proper internal controls to ensure contractors did not perform inherently governmental functions. However, that request also went unanswered. So, when a memo was sent to members of the committee to update this on their investigation with additional redactions so as to be sensitive to the nature of the information, we finally received a response from State.

It was not the one that we had hoped. When copies of the redacted information appeared in a news article, State wrote the committee a letter authored by you, Ms. Durakoglu, am I close enough? A letter threatening to only share information in camera moving forward. This is completely unacceptable, and interferes with congressional oversight. Not only are members of the committee entitled to this information, but none of it was classified.

So, we will not be deterred by State's hedging, threats, or obstruction, and we look forward to State's full and faithful cooperation moving forward. But in the meantime we're demanding accountability for State's non-compliance. Can I ask why did State only provide the committee with cooperative agreements when we asked for a redacted list of all GEC grants?

Project grants should have been included, and over 20 GEC project grants are publicly available, and you omitted them anyway, why?

Ms. DURAKOGLU. So, Congresswoman, I can take this one. And first off, thank you, my husband is a Small Business Administration employee, so thank you for your work. The work that you reference by the Global Disinformation Index, if I could just for 1 second——

Ms. VAN DUYNE. So, the question that I am asking is why did you omit records that were publicly made available?

Ms. DURAKOGLU. So, from our perspective, we did not omit records. We actually did provide a number, and I do have——

Ms. VAN DUYNE. We've got copies, you admitted records that were readily available online that were not classified.

Ms. DURAKOGLU. I do have good news for you, we actually are ready to make a production to you all next week as well.

Ms. VAN DUYNE. It took you 6 months to get this far, and you're finally able to get us more than one document?

Ms. DURAKOGLU. I will say the Global Engagement Center is under investigation by five separate committees right now. But——

Ms. VAN DUYNE. Okay, I yield back, thank you very much, Chairman.

Ms. DURAKOGLU. If I can respond, the Global Disinformation Index that we're talking about, the work that you're referencing happened in 2022. The Global Engagement Center worked with them on a Chinese propaganda project in 2021, there is actually no——

Ms. VAN DUYNE. I am simply asking why we can't get records that we've requested. These records are available, much of it is publicly available, and you have omitted it.

Ms. DURAKOGLU. Ma'am, you will get them next week.

Mr.MAST. Thank you both for your questions and responses.

Ms.VAN DUYNE. Thank you.

Mr.MAST. The chair now recognizes, again, Mr. Crow.

Mr.CROW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to address again, some of the issues that have been brought up in the intervening period since my last round of questions. And one is on this supposed atheism grant, which Mr. Verma, you were very clear, is not the focus of the grant, is not what the money has been spent on.

In fact I want to just mention that the majority, in its investigation of this issue, took a transcribed interview, and they have not agreed to actually release the transcript of that interview to the minority. That is one of the TIs that they have not agreed to release to us, No. 1. No. 2, they actually thought it was so important that we look into this, despite the fact that the State Department has been very clear that is not what the money is spent on, and that is not the focus of this grant.

The fact that it was a Republican member of this committee that created the law for the grant, that they decided it was important to send six staff from this committee, six, to Nepal and India, and they spent 80000 dollars to take this trip to conduct an onsite investigation of this issue. Where is the evidence out of that trip?

You're going to send six members of this committee, staff members, to go investigate this on the ground, and yet we're sitting here asking questions like we know nothing about it. So, clearly this is just political theater, and I apologize that you have to sit here, and you have to deal with that. Mr. Verma, what would you say about that?

Mr.VERMA. Look, I appreciate your comments, Congressman Crow, and I am grateful that the chairman is interested in this issue. I am sorry that six staff members had to go to Nepal. I care a lot about South Asia, I think about the challenges we have in South Asia, and when I think about what could have been done, there was no stop in Bangladesh to talk about the recent election and human rights.

There was no stop in Bhutan to talk about the recent election. There was no stop in Sri Lanka to talk about our competition with China. There was no stop in Maldives to talk about our new potential embassy, and our competition with China. No stop in Mauritius to talk about our future of Diego Garcia. I think about the challenges that are coming across our desk each day in and around South Asia.

Including with our partners in Nepal, it is not a five hundred thousand dollar grant. And I will continue to work on this, Mr. Chairman, because I know you care about it. But I think this is indicative of the challenge that we're having, is that the biggest issues that we are facing are real, and serious, and we want to engage with them on this committee, as I talked to Congressman Mills about just recently. About what is happening in Haiti, what is happening around the world, and U.S. interests that are at stake.

Mr.CROW. I appreciate you pointing out, Mr. Verma, that when oversight goes awry and becomes more political theater than oversight, that it is not cost free. That takes resources, that takes at-

tention away from really important issues. And on that, there was some discussion earlier about NEOs, non-combatant evacuation operations. And listen, I will be the first to join with my colleagues when a NEO doesn't go well, or there are issues, in fact I have in the past.

Rightfully criticize, and press for answers on issues. But I want to provide some important context here too. That NEOs are inherently always really hard, and they are extremely challenging, and one of the ways in which they are challenging, while there are many, one is the United States of America does not require its citizens to register with the State Department when they travel or live abroad, is that correct?

Mr.VERMA. That Is correct.

Mr.CROW. So, we really have no idea, no firm count in any given instance how many Americans are on the ground in a place.

Mr.VERMA. That is true.

Mr.CROW. Okay, and No. 2, when we talk about American citizens, many times we're talking about dual nationals, right? People who are dual national citizens of the United States, and maybe the country in question. Is that also true?

Mr.VERMA. That is true.

Mr.CROW. And is it also true that many of those folks have family members, spouses, partners, or children who may not be American citizens?

Mr.VERMA. Very true, complex family——

Mr.CROW. Which then makes the NEO extremely complicated, because you might have somebody with a blue passport, but they are sitting there with their children, and others, and there are many layers of analysis here that you have to go through to effectuate a NEO, is that accurate?

Mr.VERMA. Absolutely.

Mr.CROW. Okay.

Mr.VERMA. Could I also just say that the NEO is not a State Department call? Yes, we sign the letter that goes to the Defense Department requesting the NEO, but it is a whole of government decision that is taken quite seriously.

Mr.CROW. Okay, I appreciate that, thank you.

I yield back.

Mr.MAST. Thank you, Mr. Crow, and I appreciate your comments about atheism, and yours, Mr. Verma. I am going to get to this just after I recognize Mr. Mills, but just so you know, I do have the grant here, I didn't write it out, we just printed it out. And it says promoting and defending religious freedom inclusive of atheist, humanist, non-practicing, and non-affiliated individuals, and I will go into that more in just a couple minutes, but apparently in all your investigation over the course of those ten inquiries, you must not have come across that.

Mr. Mills, you're recognized.

Mr.MILLS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I welcome Mr. Crow on any of these evacuations that he'd welcome himself to join. Mr. Verma, you made a comment earlier about the warning of a level four situation in Haiti. Knowing that it is that risky, you also understand that there is Department of State, and USAID funded

projects with expats still abroad under your funding that are also trapped now.

So, if you recognize, I will give you an example, Chemonics International, DAI, Creative Associates, et cetera. I won't say which organizations, but there is organizations under your funding who have called me and asked for support because they couldn't get the State Department who funds them to help them to get out. Now, I understand your position, and I will let you answer, I apologize, Mr. Verma, I want to get my question out.

I understand your position in regards to giving warnings to those in hostile and threatening positions. But these are actual Americans that your programs funded to put them over there that are now trapped, and trying to seek a way out.

Mr. VERMA. Congressman, we make it very clear, and we have tens of thousands of grantees around the world, that receiving a grant from the United States is not guaranteed rescue in the event of a challenge. In fact we want the grantees to have a plan so that they can actually get out. To the extent we can help them, we will try to do that, but it is not an obligation in our contracts.

And in fact, we are quite clear, and I think the very good aid partners that we have around the world, all the big NGO's, they know exactly what they have to do to protect and support their people, and we are grateful for the incredible work that they do. And to the extent we can be helpful to them, we will.

Mr. MILLS. That is understood. Now, let me ask this question, and again, I agree with you that maybe we should look at some policy changes. And I hope that you guys can help us with those policy changes, and funding requests, I am all about trying to do funding requests that we can appropriate that would enable us to be able to further support those who get caught in these conflict, post-conflict.

Because we see the world is on fire, we see things are not getting better abroad, and we know that. You've got a tremendous amount of experience, as do the many diplomatic officers who work under you, and my hat goes off to them for their service. I worked with the State Department, I know the hard work that you guys put in every single day. But I can't ignore the facts when Americans are constantly being left behind.

When we can see through the geopolitical analysts, which by the way I was one, and published over four documents and articles on these subjects, and I think you and I have had some discussion on this, I agree with what Mr. Crow said. We can have policy objections, and maybe that is not going to be one of those areas that means obstruction, but it also doesn't mean success, it means failure.

I think until we actually start coming to a conclusion on how we further support these types of operations, organizations, and people like myself are going to have to continue to go over there. The thing that is always very odd to me is that not until political optics go wrong during election years, or the narrative starts to basically work against individuals do they start taking key actions.

Now, last week Miller said State Department has no intent, no plan to evacuate. All of a sudden, lo and behold, now they are jumping through hoops to try and get a plane. What changed?

Mr.VERMA. Look, we have to be careful about what we say publicly as well, right? Because you have to guard against the poll factor, you have to guard against people rushing a particular airport or facility. But trust me, we have been watching, and working around the clock on Haiti for months, and months, and months as the security situation has devolved.

We have been in touch with our aid organizations, we have been in touch with the diaspora community here. We have been in touch with missionary organizations to let them know it was time to get people out.

Mr.MILLS. Well, let me ask this question as a posed option, and I am looking for feedback on this. If the State Department doesn't have the resources, or the capacity, capability, even through the help of DSS, mobile training teams, et cetera, why wouldn't the State department want to work in conjunction in a PPP like scenario with organizations or individuals such as myself to support us.

As opposed to, and maybe not in our situation, or scenario, but in others where the State Department has actually intentionally worked against us to try and get us stonewalled, and slow rolled on approvals. Why wouldn't we want to work together in a more copasetic way?

Mr.VERMA. Look, we talked the other night, we were trying to be helpful to you and what you were doing, what you're doing is very courageous. If something was to go wrong with your flight, I just want to be honest with you, we'd have to—some combination of the State Department and Defense Department would have to come and help you get out. If your helicopter, if your plane had a problem——

Mr.MILLS. I just want to be clear, Mr. Verma, my life is no more valuable than every other American——

Mr.VERMA. You are a Member of Congress——

Mr.MILLS. Yes, elected by the people, and I am their employee, and I will never forget that, their life is just as important as mine.

Mr.VERMA. I am just saying there is a——

Mr.MAST. I am going to cut you both of right now because votes have begun about 10 minutes ago.

I am now going to recognize Mr. Crow for a closing statement.

Mr.CROW. Thank you, Chairman. I want to thank both of our witnesses for coming in, and being candid, fully answering the questions that you were asked, at least those that you were provided the opportunity to answer. And just to reiterate again, that we have to be really diligent in differentiating policy differences from procedural or claims of obstruction.

What we have had time and time again, in almost all of these instances that you have heard from today, there have been policy disagreements. Which are important to have, and I don't shy away from policy disagreements, in fact this is what we're supposed to do, internally debate policy disagreements. What I bristle at is when folks take a policy disagreement, and they cloak it in a claim of obstruction, or lack of good faith in providing information.

I have seen the numbers of documents, I am one of the members of this committee that actually has attended transcribed interviews. I have read the AAR documents. I have read and reviewed

almost everything that has been provided by this committee, or at least laid eyes on it to ensure it was what you represented it to be. And I can tell you that you have consistently jumped through hoops after hoops that have been put before you.

Some of which you've never dealt with before, given the unique nature of the requests coming from this committee, but you have really made every effort to do that. So, with that, I just wanted to give both of our witnesses 1 minute of my time to make any last statements of things that you really needed to address that you didn't get the opportunity to address given time constraints. I will start with Mr. Verma.

Mr.VERMA. Congressman Crow, thank you. Again, maybe I will end where I started, which is with enormous respect for the congressional role in foreign policy, in oversight of the department, and what we do. And we understand sometimes we will be in tension, we understand sometimes we may not agree. But I think we share an objective in supporting the American people around the world in advancing U.S. interests.

You will continue to have my commitment, and I know the assistant secretary, and the secretary feel this way, of working with the committee, and giving you the information that you need to do your oversight job effectively. Appreciate it.

Mr.CROW. Thank you. Ms. Durakoglu?

Ms.DURAKOGLU. I completely concur with the deputy secretary. And the one thing I would say is obviously congressional relations is not exclusive to oversight and investigations. The deputy secretary in his opening did mention over thirty-five hundred just briefings across the board. We're obviously more than happy to always accommodate any briefing request, anything else that you all may need.

I hope that folks do feel comfortable reaching out even to me directly, or anybody else, because we really do want to have a good relationship. And I will go a step further, I actually think we do have a very good relationship with this committee. So, I know sometimes the tone is a little bit different, but if I could just take off my official mask for a second, I actually like a lot of the members on this committee on both sides.

I like the staff a lot, we actually do have engagements outside of all of this, and this is actually, I think for the most part, a model for what congressional engagement on both sides should look like.

Mr.CROW. Thank you, I appreciate it. And I would like to also enter into the record, Mr. Chairman, the language, the statutory language of what was H.R. 1150, the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act.

Mr.MAST. So ordered.

[The information referred to appears in the Appendix]

Mr.CROW. This was a law that was passed by Congress through this committee in a bipartisan way. Actually the lead co-sponsor was a member of the majority. And it actually has language, I am going to read this language actually, that the State Department is legally obligated to comply with. It says by inserting quote "and the specific targeting of non-atheists, humanists, and atheists because of their beliefs, end quote, after religious persecution."

So, this Congress, this committee, in a bipartisan way actually, inserted into the law, a requirement that certain things be effectuated, that you have had a legal obligation to do so, and you have done so in compliance with the mandates of this committee. So, with that, thank you again for coming today.

I yield back.

Mr.MAST. I thank the ranking member. I now recognize myself for a closing statement. The ranking member used the term obstruction, and I am going to use the term obstruction as well. Because obstruction is what has taken place in the past, and obstruction is what has taken place today. You sat here, Mr. Verma, and pretended as though you had no idea where the word atheist might have come from in any sort of grant, anything related to Nepal, anything.

You had support from the ranking member here about it, must be crazy thinking that there is something, even went so far as to say yes, that would not be an appropriate use of dollars for the U.S. taxpayer, half a million dollars to go out there and fund a grant for atheism. I will insert this into the record as well, United States Department of State Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labor.

[The information referred to was not submitted:]

Mr.MAST. Funding floor, five hundred thousand dollars, and it says right here on the top, defending religious freedom inclusive of atheist, humanist, non-practicing, non-affiliated individuals. But maybe that is just a title, maybe it is just a general title and not really what it does. But let's read a little bit into it. It says this is the expected program outcomes.

Increase capacity among members of the atheist and heterodox individuals to form, join networks or organizations. Let's go on and look at some more of the intents of it. Creating or strengthening networks of advocates for the diverse communities of atheists, there we go, there is another one. Strengthening the capacity of organizations representing diverse communities of atheists.

Different place there. And I don't have time to read all of it, but you did just sit here, you told me just before this in these remarks, told the committee you have a great deal of respect for this committee. Apparently you have enough respect for this committee to sit here for 5 minutes, and adamantly deny that there is anything relating to a grant for atheism in Nepal.

When in fact if you did the smallest amount of research into your own agency, you would have known that it says right there on the front page of the grant request, and then it says more about it on page two, and page three, and keeps going about it. So, I think that is a good example of the obstruction, to include the ten times that we had to correspond with you to just try and get anything about that.

That is just, as you pointed out, one small grant. Unfortunately, half a million dollars is not small to anybody in my community, but a small grant compared to what the State Department doles out on a regular basis, and by the way, five hundred thousand dollars, I think the average salary in Nepal over the course of a month is

something around two hundred dollars a month is the average salary.

So, five hundred thousand dollars is a hell of a lot of money in that place. So, that is a great example of obstruction, one example of the many that we deal with here. And again, I think it shows your level of respect for this committee actually, because I know people were talking about actually wanting facts. And there is an actual fact, the fact is actually in front of you.

I notice you're not making eye contact with me anymore at this point——

Mr.VERMA. I am happy to respond——

Mr.MAST. You're not recognized at this point, we're in closing statements——

Mr.VERMA. I figured I wouldn't be——

Mr.MAST. So, in that, members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions for the witnesses. You can count on additional questions about this, and absolutely members of the State Department that were involved in that should certainly count on what you put forward as a chilling effect. People should be chilled about writing grants like that.

They would be appropriately feeling what I would expect them to feel if they feel chilled by writing grants like that. So, good choice of words there, and we will ask you to expand on those in writing. In that, pursuant to committee rules, all members may have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous materials for the record, subject to the length of limitations without objection of the committee.

The committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:39 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE**
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
Brian Mast (R-FL), Chairman

March 14, 2024

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability at 2:00 pm in room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

DATE: Thursday, March 21, 2024

TIME: 2:00 pm

LOCATION: 2172 RHOB

SUBJECT: “Examining the State Department’s Obstruction of Congressional Oversight”

WITNESSES: The Honorable Richard R. Verma
Deputy Secretary
Department of Management and Resources

The Honorable Naz Durakoğlu
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Legislative Affairs

*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chair

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202-226-8467 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day Thursday Date March 21, 2024 Room RHOB 2172

Starting Time 2:57 pm Ending Time 4:39 pm

Recesses ☐ (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___)

Presiding Member(s)
Rep. Brian Mast

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒
Executive (closed) Session ☐
Televised ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒
Stenographic Record ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:
Assessing State Department Compliance with Oversight

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:
Mast, Perry, Mills, McCaul, Salazar, Crow, Titus, Meeks

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:
Van Dyne

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*
Attached

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED 4:39 pm

Meg Wagner
Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability

118th Congress

ATTENDANCE

Meeting on: “Assessing State Department Compliance with Oversight”

Date: March 21, 2024

Convened: 2:57 PM

Adjourned: 4:39 PM

[illegible]

Public Law 114–281
114th Congress

An Act

Dec. 16, 2016
[H.R. 1150]

To amend the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to improve the ability of the United States to advance religious freedom globally through enhanced diplomacy, training, counterterrorism, and foreign assistance efforts, and through stronger and more flexible political responses to religious freedom violations and violent extremism worldwide, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

Frank R. Wolf
International
Religious
Freedom Act.
22 USC 6401
note.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) **SHORT TITLE.**—This Act may be cited as the “Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act”.

(b) **TABLE OF CONTENTS.**—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

- Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.
- Sec. 2. Findings; policy; sense of Congress.
- Sec. 3. Definitions.

TITLE I—DEPARTMENT OF STATE ACTIVITIES

- Sec. 101. Office on International Religious Freedom; Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.
- Sec. 102. Annual Report on International Religious Freedom.
- Sec. 103. Training for Foreign Service officers.
- Sec. 104. Prisoner lists and issue briefs on religious freedom concerns.

TITLE II—NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

- Sec. 201. Special Adviser for International Religious Freedom.

TITLE III—PRESIDENTIAL ACTIONS

- Sec. 301. Non-state actor designations.
- Sec. 302. Presidential actions in response to particularly severe violations of religious freedom.
- Sec. 303. Report to Congress.
- Sec. 304. Presidential waiver.
- Sec. 305. Publication in the Federal Register.

TITLE IV—PROMOTION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

- Sec. 401. Assistance for promoting religious freedom.

TITLE V—DESIGNATED PERSONS LIST FOR PARTICULARLY SEVERE VIOLATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

- Sec. 501. Designated Persons List for Particularly Severe Violations of Religious Freedom.

TITLE VI—MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

- Sec. 601. Miscellaneous provisions.
- Sec. 602. Clerical amendments.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS; POLICY; SENSE OF CONGRESS.

(a) **FINDINGS.**—Section 2(a) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6401(a)) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (3), by inserting “The freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is understood to protect theistic and non-theistic beliefs and the right not to profess or practice any religion.” before “Governments”;

(2) in paragraph (4), by adding at the end the following: “A policy or practice of routinely denying applications for visas for religious workers in a country can be indicative of a poor state of religious freedom in that country.”; and

(3) in paragraph (6)—

(A) by inserting “and the specific targeting of non-theists, humanists, and atheists because of their beliefs” after “religious persecution”; and

(B) by inserting “and in regions where non-state actors exercise significant political power and territorial control” before the period at the end.

(b) **POLICY.**—Section 2(b) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6401(b)) is amended—

(1) by redesignating paragraphs (1) through (5) as subparagraphs (A) through (E);

(2) by striking the matter preceding subparagraph (A), as redesignated, and inserting the following:

“(1) **IN GENERAL.**—The following shall be the policy of the United States.”; and

(3) by adding at the end the following:

“(2) **EVOLVING POLICIES AND COORDINATED DIPLOMATIC RESPONSES.**—Because the promotion of international religious freedom protects human rights, advances democracy abroad, and advances United States interests in stability, security, and development globally, the promotion of international religious freedom requires new and evolving policies and diplomatic responses that—

“(A) are drawn from the expertise of the national security agencies, the diplomatic services, and other governmental agencies and nongovernmental organizations; and

“(B) are coordinated across and carried out by the entire range of Federal agencies.”.

(c) **SENSE OF CONGRESS.**—It is the sense of Congress that—

(1) a policy or practice by the government of any foreign country of routinely denying visa applications for religious workers can be indicative of a poor state of religious freedom in that country; and

(2) the United States Government should seek to reverse any such policy by reviewing the entirety of the bilateral relationship between such country and the United States.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

Section 3 of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6402) is amended—

(1) by redesignating paragraph (13) as paragraph (16);

(2) by redesignating paragraphs (10), (11), and (12) as paragraphs (12), (13), and (14), respectively;

(3) by inserting after paragraph (9) the following:

“(10) **INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.**—The term ‘institution of higher education’ has the meaning given that term in section 101 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001).

“(11) NON-STATE ACTOR.—The term ‘non-state actor’ means a nonsovereign entity that—

“(A) exercises significant political power and territorial control;

“(B) is outside the control of a sovereign government; and

“(C) often employs violence in pursuit of its objectives.”; (4) by inserting after paragraph (14), as redesignated, the following:

“(15) SPECIAL WATCH LIST.—The term ‘Special Watch List’ means the Special Watch List described in section 402(b)(1)(A)(iii).”; and

(5) in paragraph (16), as redesignated—

(A) in subparagraph (A)—

(i) by redesignating clauses (iv) and (v) as clauses (v) and (vi), respectively; and

(ii) by inserting after clause (iii) the following:

“(iv) not professing a particular religion, or any religion;”; and

(B) in subparagraph (B)—

(i) by inserting “conscience, non-theistic views, or” before “religious belief or practice”; and

(ii) by inserting “forcibly compelling non-believers or non-theists to recant their beliefs or to convert,” after “forced religious conversion,”.

TITLE I—DEPARTMENT OF STATE ACTIVITIES

SEC. 101. OFFICE ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM; AMBASSADOR AT LARGE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 101 of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6411) is amended—

(1) in subsection (b), by inserting “, and shall report directly to the Secretary of State” before the period at the end;

(2) in subsection (c)—

(A) in paragraph (1)—

(i) by striking “responsibility” and inserting “responsibilities”;

(ii) by striking “shall be to advance” and inserting the following: “shall be to—

“(A) advance”;

(iii) in subparagraph (A), as redesignated, by striking the period at the end and inserting “; and”; and

(iv) by adding at the end the following:

“(B) integrate United States international religious freedom policies and strategies into the foreign policy efforts of the United States.”;

(B) in paragraph (2), by inserting “the principal adviser to” before “the Secretary of State”;

(C) in paragraph (3)—

(i) in subparagraph (A), by striking “and” at the end;

Opinion Don't defund the fight against Russia and China's disinformation



By the [Editorial Board](#)
 | [+ Follow](#)

March 19, 2024 at 7:00 a.m. EDT

Two authoritarian U.S. adversaries, Russia and China, are carrying out what some have called a "[hidden war on democracy](#)," attempting to shape global opinion using deception and false narratives. By [one estimate](#), Russia spends about \$1.5 billion a year and China [\\$7 billion or more annually](#) to influence overseas audiences. [We've argued before](#) that the United States should resist their information warfare. Unfortunately, House Republicans are threatening to eliminate a key U.S. agency that does so.

The [Global Engagement Center](#) (GEC), headquartered at the State Department, deploys a \$61 million budget and a staff of 125 to counter disinformation from Russia, China, Iran and terrorist organizations. It was founded as part of the fight against terrorist messaging. It is due for congressional reauthorization by the end of this year. A measure has cleared the Senate, but the Republican-controlled House has refused to follow suit, meaning the program could lapse.

Follow this author's opinions



The GEC efforts to preempt disinformation have been promising. Last month, the GEC exposed an attempt by Russia's security services to undercut U.S. influence in Africa through a new disinformation agency, called [African Initiative](#). According to the center, this agency intended to spread tales about the outbreak of a mosquito-borne viral disease, to be followed by conspiracy theories about Western pharmaceutical corporations, health-focused philanthropic efforts, and the spread of disease in West and East Africa. Even before this, Russia had an active campaign in Moscow to claim, falsely, that the United States was testing biological weapons in Ukraine. The claim was based on twisted information about legitimate public health projects in Ukraine sponsored by the United States to fight disease. Russia's untruths were picked up and widely disseminated by China, too.

The African Initiative was going to use social media and place articles in the news. It recruited staff from the enterprises of mercenary chieftain Yevgeniy Prigozhin, who started a Russian troll farm that attempted to disrupt the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Mr. Prigozhin's Wagner Group had extensive contracts in Africa before his death in a suspicious plane crash in Russia.

The GEC got ahead and labeled the African Initiative as a Russian creation, thus preventing many from believing untruths that could have discouraged them from seeking legitimate health care. This fall, the GEC also unmasked a Russian effort in Latin America. The organization exposed how past Russian officials were launching a disinformation campaign to convince “Latin American audiences that Russia’s war against Ukraine is just” and to get across “Russia’s broader false narrative that it is a champion against neocolonialization.”

Conservatives in Congress and elsewhere have complained that the center is part of an effort to muffle conservative speech and ideas in the United States. They have pointed to the GEC’s funding of a London-based group, the Global Disinformation Index (GDI), in late 2021. That \$100,000 grant helped to expand a disinformation tool in Asia. An entirely unrelated GDI project, published in December 2022, had compiled a list of U.S. media outlets likely to be susceptible to disinformation. The GEC and GDI projects were quite separate, but conservatives charged the GEC with underwriting a blacklist of conservative voices. Elon Musk wrote on his platform X, “The worst offender in U.S. government censorship & media manipulation is an obscure agency called GEC.”

Two news organizations on the list, the Federalist and the Daily Wire, have filed suit against the GEC, saying the GEC has infringed on their First Amendment rights by “actively intervening in the news-media market to render disfavored press outlets unprofitable by funding the infrastructure, development, and marketing and promotion of censorship technology and private censorship enterprises to covertly suppress speech.” This is misguided. The center does not look at what goes on inside the United States — all its programs are for fighting disinformation abroad. The GEC also instructs its grantees not to work in the United States.

The House Republicans who are taking down the GEC could, more constructively, reauthorize the program with legislative language that would ban any operations in the United States. By eliminating the program altogether, they would deny the United States a vital tool in a contest for hearts and minds around the world — while rewarding the purveyors of lies.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #1
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

On February 16, 2024, National Review, broke the existence of a cable Secretary Blinken issued on February 5, 2024, titled "Modeling DEIA: Gender Identity Best Practices." My staff requested a copy of this document to form the basis of further oversight. On March 6, 2024, Stacy Thompson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for House Affairs in the Bureau of Legislative Affairs, refused to provide a copy of this embarrassing document, offering instead a briefing on the topic that would not be suitably informative without the underlying document. Will you provide this document for the record?

Answer:

The Department is committed to cooperation with Congressional oversight. When Congress requests specific non-public documents, it is standard practice for the request to come in the form of a signed letter from a committee chair. Once in receipt of such a letter, the Department would be happy to work with the requesting Chair and staff on the document request. The Department's offer to brief you or your staff on Department guidance related to gender identity in the workplace still stands.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #2
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

During this Congress, I have posed several questions to the State Department that were then ignored in the Department's responses. I repeat them here and ask that the Department respond individually to each one. Unanswered questions posed in a letter to Secretary Blinken and National Security Advisor Sullivan regarding the decision that scheduled Assistant Secretary for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink and White House National Security Council's senior director for China and Taiwan affairs, Sarah Beran to land in Beijing on this the 34th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre. Who suggested June 4 as a meeting date? Did the State Department attempt to find alternative dates? Did the PRC set a visit on June 4 as a precondition for any engagements or suggest that it would significantly improve the likelihood of scheduling meetings?

Answer:

Assistant Secretary Kritenbrink traveled to Beijing for meetings with his counterpart on June 5 as one part of broader travel to the region. The only way he could get to Beijing by June 5 was to leave Washington on June 2, which led him to arrive in Beijing on June 4. Simultaneously, as we do every year, the State Department issued a statement and tweet observing

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the 34th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre. There is no ambiguity regarding our views on the Tiananmen Massacre.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #3
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Which U.S. officials had final decision-making authority on beginning the visit on June 4?

Answer:

Assistant Secretary Kritenbrink agreed to travel to Beijing for meetings with his counterpart beginning on June 5.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #4
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

What assurances, if any, were made to the PRC that no public events would be undertaken to commemorate the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre after officials arrived in Beijing on June 4?

Answer:

We made no assurances on that or any other matter. As we do every year, the State Department issued a statement and tweet observing the 34th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre. There is no ambiguity regarding our views on the Tiananmen Massacre.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #5
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

What factors led to determining that the visit (on June 4) was so urgent that it could not be moved to the following week?

Answer:

Assistant Secretary Kritenbrink traveled to Beijing for meetings with his counterpart on June 5 ahead of his broader travel to the region. His visit delivered progress on U.S. priorities. He raised our longstanding human rights concerns with senior PRC officials and helped re-establish the conditions for Secretary Blinken's visit later that month.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #6
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

What human rights issues did the delegation raise, and at what level? The response to the letter states that “While in Beijing during his June 18-19 visit, Secretary Blinken raised concerns about PRC human rights violations and abuses in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, as well as individual cases of concern.” Which individual cases were raised? Did Krittenbrink’s delegation raise any individual cases?

Answer:

Yes, Assistant Secretary Krittenbrink’s delegation raised individual cases of concern. While I cannot go into detail about individual cases in an unclassified setting, Assistant Secretary Krittenbrink raised PRC human rights violations in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, as well as individual cases of concern. The PRC’s continued unacceptable attempts to intimidate and silence those speaking out for human rights only contribute to increasing international scrutiny of the ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang, as well as the broad range of other human rights abuses and violations taking place across the PRC.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #7
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

How did the State Department assess the impact of beginning the visit on June 4 on longstanding U.S. commitments to human rights in China?

Answer:

Assistant Secretary Krittenbrink traveled to Beijing to begin meetings with his counterpart on June 5. There is no ambiguity regarding our views on the Tiananmen Massacre. The United States will continue advocating for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the PRC and around the world.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #8
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Did officials raise the Tiananmen Square Massacre in their comments or discussions and if so, what tangible action was requested? Did officials express their concern for the inability of Chinese citizens to publicly discuss, commemorate or remember this tragic date?

Answer:

There is no ambiguity regarding our views on the Tiananmen Massacre. Assistant Secretary Krittenbrink discussed the Tiananmen Massacre with his counterpart in Beijing. We remain committed to using all tools available to address PRC human rights abuses, including the ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang. We've acted quickly and effectively, using Global Magnitsky Act and Section 7031(c) authorities, the Entity List, withhold release orders, and by releasing our Business Advisory to promote accountability for officials involved in human rights abuses and violations, while continuing to relentlessly evaluate the options we have available to take action. That work is ongoing.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #9
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Unanswered questions posed for the record to R/GEC Principal Deputy Coordinator Daniel Kimmage, October 25, 2023. Is there an organizational chart the GEC will provide for the review of this committee?

Answer:

The Department has briefed the committee and provided over one thousand responsive documents. We would be happy to provide the current organizational chart for the GEC to the committee upon receipt of an official request.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #10
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Through grants or subgrants, the GEC has partnered with organizations that have attempted to censor the free speech rights of Americans and “demonetize” mainstream conservative media platforms. Does the GEC regret any aspect of these grants or subgrants? Given the fungibility of money, does the GEC assess that it is supporting this work through such partnerships?

Answer:

The GEC focuses on countering foreign disinformation and propaganda overseas that threatens the policies, security or stability of the United States, its allies, and partner nations. Decisions regarding partnerships and programs are made in accordance with this mission. The GEC does not have a political agenda.

Consistent with applicable law, the Department has policies and processes in place to help ensure that grant funds are used for their intended purposes and to prevent the misuse of funds. Therefore, funds awarded should not be viewed as “fungible.”

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #11
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Is it the GEC's position that conservative political beliefs are: 1) contrary to America's national interest, 2) misinformation, 3) disinformation, 4) propaganda, or 5) supportive of our adversaries?

Answer:

The GEC focuses on countering foreign disinformation and propaganda overseas that threatens the policies, security or stability of the United States, its allies, and partner nations. The GEC does not have a political agenda.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #12
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Can the GEC commit to terminating all partnerships with organizations that target American conservatives?

Answer:

The GEC focuses on countering foreign disinformation and propaganda overseas that threatens the policies, security or stability of the United States, its allies, and partner nations. Decisions regarding partnerships and programs are made in accordance with this mission. The GEC does not have a political agenda.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #13
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Does the GEC believe that unsettled scientific debates should be treated as settled facts for purposes of assessing whether an opinion is misinformation?

Answer:

The GEC focuses on countering foreign disinformation and propaganda overseas that threatens the policies, security or stability of the United States, its allies, and partner nations.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #14
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Do you think of the GEC as part of a global counter disinformation ecosystem and if so, what are the contours of that ecosystem?

Answer:

The GEC focuses on countering foreign disinformation and propaganda overseas that threatens the policies, security or stability of the United States, its allies, and partner nations. The GEC works closely with U.S. allies and partners to push back effectively against state and nonstate actors that want to exploit the information domain overseas through foreign information manipulation.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #15
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Do you believe the GEC mission includes the countering of bigotry? If so, how do you define this term?

Answer:

The GEC focuses on countering foreign disinformation and propaganda overseas that threatens the policies, security or stability of the United States, its allies, and partner nations.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #16
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Unanswered questions for the Record Submitted to EUR Assistant Secretary James C. O'Brien, November 15, 2023. During the hearing, you testified that the Administration is committed to using sanctions if other means fail. Following up on that, has the Treasury Department developed a target list of entities that could be sanctioned if Azerbaijan escalates? If yes, to what extent does this include assets owned or controlled by President Aliiev?

Answer:

We do not rule out the use of any of the tools at our disposal to achieve our foreign policy goals. We continue to prioritize helping Armenia and Azerbaijan reach a durable, dignified peace and supporting Armenia's efforts to aid displaced persons. We are also working to strengthen Armenia's economic resiliency.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #17
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Please describe the depth of Azerbaijan's political, economic, and military relationship with Russia, and how this hinders America's strategic interests in the region?

Answer:

Azerbaijan has refused to join the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union or rejoin the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Azerbaijan voted in favor of UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262, which affirmed Ukraine's territorial integrity and condemned Russia's occupation of Crimea. Azerbaijan has offered humanitarian and energy support to Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion. The United States stands firmly against Russia's aggression and attempts to spread its malign influence, including in the South Caucasus.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #18
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Sanctioned Russian and Iranian companies own significant shares in Azerbaijan's gas fields that export energy to Europe, and Azerbaijan has recently signed lucrative energy deals with both countries. Is this administration aware of the extent of Azerbaijan's energy ties with Russia and Iran, and does it believe this behavior is consistent with our regional interests?

Answer:

Azerbaijan has long been an important partner in diversifying energy supplies to Europe. Azerbaijan has agreed to double its gas exports to EU by 2027. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which carries over 650,000 barrels of oil a day to Turkey, was an early success. The Southern Gas Corridor played a critical role in supporting European energy security after Putin weaponized gas supplies to Europe following his full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Azerbaijan contributes to the creation of multiple routes to markets for the region's oil and gas, and we support Azerbaijan's efforts to support European energy security.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #19
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

The Department has stonewalled the Committee in its efforts to understand the circumstances around the departure of former Special Envoy for Iran Rob Malley. If this Committee were to make a formal request of Mr. Malley's emails, travel, and scheduling calendars would you be willing to commit to turn those over to this committee?

Answer:

The Department has produced to the Committee personnel information requested by Chairman McCaul in his initial inquiry regarding Mr. Malley. If the Chairman wishes to submit a request for additional documents in this inquiry, the Department would be happy to work with the Committee to respond to a new or modified letter from the Chairman, including with appropriate document productions.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #20
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Is there an ongoing criminal investigation into Mr. Malley?

Answer:

Consistent with longstanding Executive Branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not confirm or deny the existence of an investigation.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #21
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Can you assure us that no Iranian citizen or individual affiliated with the Iran government gained inappropriate access due to any action undertaken by Mr. Malley?

Answer:

Consistent with longstanding Executive Branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not confirm or deny the existence of an investigation or speak to the specific content of any such investigation.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #22
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Can you assure this Committee that Mr. Malley is not under investigation for espionage?

Answer:

Consistent with longstanding Executive Branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not confirm or deny the existence of an investigation.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #23
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Can you tell us if there are any other State Department employees or officials – or non-State Department employees or officials who are under investigation in the Rob Malley matter?

Answer:

Consistent with longstanding Executive Branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not confirm or deny the existence of an investigation.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #24
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Separate and apart from the investigation you are conducting, to your knowledge did Mr. Malley conduct any official State Department business on private email or a personal cell phone, including through text messages?

Answer:

As a general matter, Department policy as published in the Foreign Affairs Manual allows for limited use of personal email and/or devices. Consistent with longstanding Executive Branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not provide information regarding individual personnel-security matters.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Darrell Issa #25
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

To your knowledge, did Mr. Malley have or maintain personal contacts with Iranian government officials that were not directly authorized by the State Department?

Answer:

Department policy reflected in the Foreign Affairs Manual requires reporting of foreign contacts under certain circumstances. Consistent with longstanding Executive Branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not provide information regarding individual personnel-security matters.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Brian Mast #1
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Have you ever personally reviewed a document production, page-by-page, that is sent in response to an inquiry by this committee? If you have, please specify which productions you have personally reviewed.

Answer:

I take seriously my responsibilities for managing and being responsive to the Department workforce, as well as the Secretary's commitment to being responsive to Congress. As such, I have at times reviewed particularly sensitive documents produced to Congress, including, for example, those that implicated employees' personal views that were initially shared in confidence and not intended for public disclosure, such as the Afghanistan After-Action Review (AAR) interview notes.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #2
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

How many staff are currently responsible for the compilation and delivery of document productions?

Answer:

The number of staff working on Congressional document production fluctuates. It is determined by the number of congressional investigations, as well as the size and scope of the productions requested. Currently, there are about 12 staff who have congressional investigations in their portfolio (including me). This number does not reflect the dozens of officers who have been pulled off their daily responsibilities to monitor and respond to national security events in order to answer 44 unique inquiries this Congress and produce over 40,000 pages to six committees. State Department personnel across every single bureau are pulled away from their regular duties to contribute to document production and have spent tens of thousands of hours over the past year reviewing every single document

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produced to Congress. We will remain responsive to your requests and continue to ask committee staff to tailor requests and prioritize the Chair's stated needs over staff interests.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #3
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

What processes does the Department use to specifically track what document requests have been made, and precisely identify whether these requests have been fulfilled?

Answer:

The Department relies on the initial chairs' letters making the formal document requests as well as ongoing conversations with committee staff to identify and prioritize outstanding requests.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #4
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Will you commit to providing the committee with a copy of this tracking mechanism, so that it may better understand how the Department views its own compliance efforts?

Answer:

While the Department is committed to ensuring the Committee can carry out its oversight responsibilities and has the information it needs for the purpose of legislating, it is a longstanding Executive Branch position that Congress cannot dictate how the Department goes about providing the requested information, based on the principle of separation of powers and the need to protect the deliberative process.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #5
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Why has the Department produced documents without identifying what request the documents are responsive to? What the Committee has largely received may generously be termed “document dumps.”

Answer:

The Department is committed to working with you and your staff to clarify any questions or confusion regarding the Department’s document productions. Where the Committee does not prioritize or narrow document requests, the Department produces all documents potentially responsive to the Committee’s request, including documents that may be duplicative or that substantively may not be of interest to the Committee. This is especially true in response to a subpoena, for which the Department is required to produce all responsive documents, regardless of duplication.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #6
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Will you commit to implementing a system, by June 1st of this year, to account for this, specifically identifying which productions are responsive to which inquiries and disaggregating these productions accordingly?

Answer:

The Department is happy to work with your staff to assess whether there is a way to more clearly identify for you and your staff to which inquiries productions are responsive.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma & Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #7
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

What is the Department's policy regarding a target response time for document requests and will you commit to producing and adhering to a target response time policy, not exceeding two months, from the date of request?

Answer:

The Department works to produce documents as expeditiously as possible. Each document request is unique, and some can implicate tens of thousands of pages of responsive records or complex searches. Narrowing and prioritizing document requests can help reduce the amount of time it takes for the Department to make productions. Over the past year, the Department has responded 19 oversight inquiries from this Committee alone and thus far has produced more than 22,000 pages of documents in response.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Brian Mast #8
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

In the lead up to this oversight subcommittee hearing you offered me and other members the chance to come over to the Department to meet with its employees. Staff and I would like to take you up on your offer and meet with the document production teams to understand where there are inefficiencies and obstacles. Would you agree to facilitating that opportunity?

Answer:

I would welcome the opportunity to personally host you at the Department and answer any of your questions relating to oversight matters. While the Department is committed to ensuring the Committee can carry out its oversight responsibilities and has the information it needs for the purpose of legislating, it is a longstanding Executive Branch position that Congress cannot dictate how the Department goes about providing the requested information, based on the principle of separation of powers and the need to protect the deliberative process.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #9
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

After Chairman McCaul sent Secretary Blinken a third letter requesting information regarding the status of the investigation into Mr. Robert Malley and the circumstances surrounding his security clearance, our committee finally received a classified briefing, the substantive content of which was minimal. The State Department has stated that, due to the Privacy Act, it cannot provide our committee with the information we have requested, even though the Privacy Act has a specific exemption for Congressional oversight. Will you provide detailed information on (1) the allegations against Mr. Malley, (2) the circumstances in which the Department became aware of the allegations, (3) the suspension of Mr. Malley's security clearance and any subsequent staffing decisions, (4) the impact on U.S. national security, and (5) the timeline for and expected conclusion of the Department's investigation?

Answer:

The Department has provided certain Privacy Act-protected information regarding Mr. Malley to the Committee, with appropriate protections and consistent with that Act, upon receiving a Chair's request. The Department is limited in the information it may provide to the Committee regarding individual security clearances due to law-enforcement sensitivities and other agency involvement.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #10
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

The committee is sensitive to the delicate nature of ongoing law enforcement investigations such as the one the FBI has been conducting into Mr. Malley. However, the U.S. Supreme Court has held that even ongoing law enforcement implications cannot limit the Committee's power to conduct its own inquiries (*McGrain v. Daugherty*, 273 U.S. 135). Given that neither the Privacy Act nor the ongoing law enforcement investigation precludes you from sharing information with Congress as a part of an ongoing inquiry, if State has any documents relating to Mr. Malley's case, why have they not been turned over, and will you provide that information to the Committee?

Answer:

As a general matter, consistent with longstanding Executive Branch policy and practice, the Department is limited in what information it is able to share regarding an ongoing law enforcement investigation due to law enforcement sensitivities and individual privacy interests.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #11
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

On August 28, 2023, and October 5, 2023, Chairman McCaul sent two letters expressing concern about how and why the Tehran Times, a publication with close association to the Iranian government, came to be in possession of a Sensitive but Unclassified (SBU) memorandum that notified Mr. Malley of his clearance suspension. Is this document authentic and, if so, how did this document end up in the hands of the Tehran Times?

Answer:

I am not in a position to confirm or deny the authenticity of this purported official document.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #12
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

The State Department recently established a new bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy (GHSD). Last year, State sent a letter to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, committing to brief the committee once a quarter as well as prevent redundancy and a duplication of efforts with other Department bureaus and other federal agencies. Will you ensure that the Department honors that commitment letter and immediately schedule said briefing for the Committee?

Answer:

Yes. The Department has undertaken a series of quarterly briefings on GHSD and will schedule the next quarterly briefing expeditiously.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #13
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

When the committee sent questions to this new GHSD bureau to try to figure out what it has been working on, the bureau took months to respond and, when it finally did, answered questions by copying and pasting text from its website. The Bureau of Legislative Affairs didn't even bother to change the font. In your view, is copying and pasting an appropriate way to respond to congressional inquiries?

Answer:

I am not familiar with this matter, despite bi-weekly calls with committee leadership. Thank you for raising it. I will look into this matter and will ensure that this does not occur in the future. I look forward to working with you and your staff to keep you informed about the bureau's activities.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #14
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

At times this Committee has been asked to clear on CNs, such as the Dublin Embassy CN, quickly despite providing the CNs with little or no time for staff to request more information. Will you commit to timely providing CNs to avoid deadlines and ensure the Department has fully responded to all outstanding congressional oversight requests from this committee?

Answer:

The Dublin Embassy congressional notification (CN) should have been provided to the Committees in a timelier manner. The Department makes every effort to send CNs to committees as allocation and programming decisions are finalized, but the increasingly compressed budget cycle can make it difficult to build in weeks of extra time. The Department also makes every effort to respond to all Congressional oversight and other requests, as demonstrated by the significant number of documents, hearings, and briefings provided to your committee.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma & Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #15
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

When it comes to our oversight of foreign aid programs that are facilitating illegal migration in Mexico, the Department produced only publicly accessible materials and a single project proposal. Why did the Department take five months to produce documents that were essentially already publicly accessible, failing to provide the in-depth, non-public information the Committee specifically requested?

Answer:

Department-funded programs do not facilitate unlawful activity by migrants; they promote safe, humane migration management, including by offering durable solutions to migrants where they are. The Department welcomed the information provided by the Committee about the materials it was seeking after receiving our initial tranche of documents and is providing further submissions. The Department will continue to endeavor to provide you with further information in a timelier manner.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma & Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #16
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Will you commit to ensuring that all future responses to document requests related to aid programs in Mexico are comprehensive, and include all specific, non-public details necessary for thorough Congressional oversight, without undue delays?

Answer:

The Department works to respond to document requests as expeditiously as possible and reiterates its commitment to do so in this specific investigation.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma & Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #17
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

In the committee's investigation, Chairman McCaul's letter dated October 26, 2022, sought clarity on the legal assistance funded by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and/or Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), specifically probing the nature of legal programming provided. Despite the Department's assertions that PRM does not fund legal counsel related to U.S. immigration, subsequent documents revealed to the Committee contradict this stance, showcasing funded programs that advise migrants on U.S. asylum procedures. This discrepancy raises significant concerns about the veracity of the Department's communications and the actual scope of the funded legal assistance. Given the explicit request for details on legal assistance, how does the Department explain the contradiction between its stated policies and the documented evidence indicating funding for U.S. immigration-related counsel?

Answer:

Neither PRM nor DRL funds legal representation or counseling related to U.S. immigration proceedings. PRM does fund UNHCR and NGO partners which offer some legal counseling and/or representation for individuals seeking asylum or other forms of legal status under the laws of Mexico. With regards to the one document in question, Department funds were not

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used in its development. The document was used in Mexico at group legal orientation sessions for refugees and asylum seekers.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma & Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #18
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Will you perform a comprehensive review of the Department's funded legal assistance programs to rectify any discrepancies and ensure future communications accurately reflect the programs' true nature?

Answer:

Neither PRM nor DRL funds legal representation or counseling related to U.S. immigration proceedings. The Department continuously monitors all programs we fund and will communicate with Congress any challenges we face on the concerns you raised. We welcome the information you referenced on possible discrepancies to address any miscommunication regarding the Department's programming.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma & Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #19
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Will you provide complete and unambiguous information regarding the scope of legal assistance funded by the Department, particularly in areas impacting U.S. immigration policies, to maintain the integrity of Congressional oversight?

Answer:

Yes. The Department will continue to provide complete and unambiguous information regarding the scope of legal assistance funded by the Department.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #20
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Why has the State Department, for over 10 months, adamantly refused to produce the key personnel involved in supervising the design of the so-called atheism grants administered by the Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF) and the selection of the implementing partner, despite repeated requests from the committee? The witnesses the Committee requested are senior level officials with decades of experience, including extensive experience dealing with Congress. Will you commit to ensuring that all requested department officials, specifically those with direct involvement in the grant process, will be made available for transcribed interviews without further delay?

Answer:

The Department has responded extensively to the Committee's request, including briefings, providing more than 1,600 pages of documents, making available three senior officials for interviews, and facilitating staff travel to meet with embassy staff. As a general practice, the Department will seek to accommodate the Committee by making more senior employees available for transcribed interviews on particular issues, in order to avoid

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potential chilling of the deliberative process or politicization of working level, non-partisan Department employees.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #21
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

What specific steps are being taken to rectify the persistent delays in providing essential monitoring and evaluation (M&E) documents related to the atheism grants, and how does the Department reconcile these delays with its commitment to transparency?

Answer:

The Department has already provided 1,600 pages in response to the Committee's request and additional documents are forthcoming.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Brian Mast #22
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Will you provide an immediate and comprehensive production of the requested documents, specifically those detailing how the grant funds were utilized by grantees and subgrantees?

Answer:

The Department will continue working closely with the Committee to respond to the Committee's requests for information including providing to the Committee all documents in its possession that speak to how the grant funds were utilized by grantees and subgrantees.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma & Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Maria Elvira Salazar #1
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Disley Alfonso Santos, owner of the Cuban MIPYME MadWoman was honored by the State Department as part of the 2023 WeAmericas IVLP program. Was a background check on Disley Alfonso Santos carried out by the State Department?

Answer:

The International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) maintains a rigorous process to identify strategic contacts who will be exposed to U.S. values through the program. U.S. embassies around the world nominate all IVLP participants through an interagency IVLP selection committee. Once approved, all IVLP participants must qualify for a visa through an interagency security vetting process with approved consular systems. Ms. Alfonso's nomination followed this review process.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma & Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Maria Elvira Salazar #2
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Was Disley Alfonso Santos determined to not be sympathetic to the Castro/Diaz-Canel regime?

Answer:

We have no specific information regarding Ms. Alfonso's views toward the Cuban regime.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma & Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Maria Elvira Salazar #3
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Does the State Department plan to comply with the document request of all communications including but not limited to emails, letters, text messages and phone calls between the United States Embassy in Havana and the MIPYME MadWoman by the April 1st deadline made by Congresswoman María Elvira Salazar in her capacity as Chairwoman of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee of the Foreign Affairs Committee in a letter to President Biden?

Answer:

We would be happy to work with you and your staff to provide you more information as appropriate in your capacity as Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma & Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Maria Elvira Salazar #4
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

What is the exact amount of money that was paid by the U.S. Government to the MIPYME MadWoman in return for the various marketing services provided to the U.S. Embassy in Havana including but not limited to social media posts related to International Women's Day, Black History Month and discouraging illegal immigration?

Answer:

To date, Embassy Havana has procured \$31,530 worth of goods and services, through 13 purchase orders, from the Cuban private small business MadWoman. Of the 13 purchase orders, six were for migration-related messaging/campaigns, five for designs for strategic programs (Black History Month 2023 and 2024, Pride Month 2023, a musical exchange with local university students, and a film diplomacy program), one promoting bilingualism, and one Ukraine-related campaign in 2023.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma & Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Maria Elvira Salazar #5
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Prior to the U.S. Embassy in Havana contracting the MIPYME MadWoman, was a thorough investigation carried out on MadWoman to determine its ties to the Castro/Diaz-Canel regime? If so, can you please describe the different ways in which the State Department investigated MadWoman?

Answer:

Embassy Havana continues to carefully vet U.S. government contractors and program participants. Since the Cuban government allowed small businesses in 2021, the private sector in Cuba now comprises 30 percent of employment in Cuba. Small businesses such as MadWoman receive no government support and are often harassed by the Cuban regime, but they are willing to operate in Cuba for the benefit of the Cuban people even understanding they may face regime scrutiny.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma & Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Maria Elvira Salazar #6
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Was the State Department aware that MadWoman's office is located in a building located at Calle 20 and Avenida 7ma in Havana which is property of Corporación CIMEX SA which is itself owned by GAESA?

Answer:

Due to the Cuban regime's draconian property regulations, it is common practice for private businesses to rent office space or entire facilities owned by the Cuban government. Given challenges with purchasing and renting property, many entrepreneurs and businesses – local and foreign – lease space for their operations as there are few other options.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma & Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Maria Elvira Salazar #7
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Does the State Department believe that a MIPYME can be located in a building owned by GAESA and be truly independent of the Castro/Diaz-Canel regime?

Answer:

The Cuban government owns nearly all commercial office space. Private businesses and foreign companies rent from the Cuban regime, consistent with Cuban property laws. In 2011, the Cuban government permitted limited private property ownership with specific requirements. However, property ownership is not feasible for many small businesses. Private sector development in Cuba is in its early stages as Cuba cautiously embraces some elements of a market economy.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma & Assistant Secretary Naz Durakoglu by
Representative Maria Elvira Salazar #8
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Does the U.S. Embassy in Havana have currently a contract with MadWoman or with any other MIPYME in Cuba?

Answer:

Embassy Havana has one active contract with MadWoman for a campaign to discourage irregular migration. Embassy Havana partners with local businesses such as MadWoman to further U.S. priorities. Restrictive media environments, such as in Cuba, require a fight against confusion and disinformation with accurate messaging on U.S. policies and priorities. To promote a free, democratic Cuba, the Department carefully vets U.S. government contractors and program participants.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Beth Van Duyne #1
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Why did State omit all project grants from its December 2023 and March 2024 productions to the House Committee on Small Business when records on all grants, to include project grants in addition to cooperative agreements and other grant types, were requested?

Answer:

In prior correspondence, the Department provided you with a chart listing the GEC's cooperative agreements from FY 2019 through FY 2023. This chart did not include any grants because the GEC did not award any grants during this time, but the GEC did award 69 cooperative agreements. The GEC awarded two grants in FY 2018, which were included in an updated chart listing cooperative agreements and grants from FY 2018 to the present that we separately provided to the Committee.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Secretary Richard Verma by
Representative Beth Van Duyne #2
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
March 21, 2024**

Question:

Please identify the award recipients for the following cooperative agreement award numbers that were omitted from State's productions, in addition to any others in fiscal years 2019 through present that were not included: Award Number SGECPD19CA0001, SGECPD19CA0002, SGECPD19CA0004, SGECPD19CA0005, SGECPD19CA0006, SGECPD19CA0007, SGECPD19CA0008, SGECPD19CA0009, SGECPD19CA0010, SGECPD19CA0011, SGECPD19CA0012, SGECPD19CA0013, SGECPD19CA0015, SGECPD19CA0016, SGECPD19CA0017, SGECPD19CA0018, SGECPD19CA0019, SGECPD19CA0024, SGECPD20CA0001, SGECPD20CA0002, SGECPD20CA0003, SGECPD20CA0004, SGECPD20CA0005, SGECPD20CA0006, SGECPD20CA0011, SGECPD20CA0012, SGECPD20CA0013, SGECPD20CA0014, SGECPD20CA0015, SGECPD20CA0016, SGECPD21CA3003, SGECPD21CA3004, SGECPD21CA3005, SGECPD21CA3008, SGECPD21CA3009, SGECPD21CA3010, SGECPD21CA3011, SGECPD21CA3012, SGECPD21CA3014, SGECPD21CA3015, SGECPD21CA3016, SGECPD21CA3017, SGECPD21CA3018, SGECPD21CA3019, SGECPD21CA3020, SGECPD21CA3021, SGECPD21CA3025, SGECPD21CA3026, SGECPD21CA3027, SGECPD21CA3028, SGECPD21CA3029, SGECPD21CA3031, SGECPD21CA3032, SGECPD21CA3035, SGECPD22CA0001, SGECPD22CA0002, SGECPD22CA0003, SGECPD22CA0004, SGECPD22CA0005, SGECPD22CA0006, SGECPD22CA0007, SGECPD22CA0008, SGECPD22CA0009, SGECPD22CA0010, SGECPD22CA0011, SGECPD22CA0012, SGECPD22CA0013, SGECPD22CA0014, SGECPD22CA0015, SGECPD22CA0016, SGECPD22CA0017,

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SGECPD22CA0018, SGECPD22CA0019, SGECPD22CA0020,
SGECPD22CA0021, SGECPD22CA0022, SGECPD22CA0023,
SGECPD22CA0024, SGECPD22CA0025, SGECPD22CA0026,
SGECPD22CA0027, SGECPD22CA0028, SGECPD22CA0029,
SGECPD22CA0034. SGECPD22CA0040, SGECPD23CA0001,
SGECPD23CA0002, SGECPD23CA0003, SGECPD23CA0004,
SGECPD23CA0005, SGECPD23CA0006, SGECPD23CA0007,
SGECPD23CA0008, SGECPD23CA0009, SGECPD23CA0010

Answer:

The gaps in the FAIN numbers in the chart provided do not indicate omitted grants or cooperative agreements. The Department can confirm that, to our best understanding, the chart included all GEC grant recipients and cooperative agreements from FY 2019 to FY 2023.

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