

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

February 23, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is investigating reports that federal funds administered by the Department of State (Department) were used to suppress lawful speech and defund disfavored news outlets under the guise of combatting disinformation. The Committee is disturbed by recent reporting that taxpayer money ended up in the hands of a foreign organization running an advertising blacklist of organizations accused of hosting disinformation on their websites, including several conservative-leaning news organizations.¹ The Committee seeks documents and a staff-level briefing to understand the scope of the Department's use of federal funds for a taxpayer-funded censorship campaign.

According to the Washington Examiner, the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) received \$330,000 in federal funds administered by the Department.² This British organization offers "risk ratings" to major ad companies to advise them on what websites and news outlets to avoid.³ Some of the media outlets GDI identified as the "riskiest" include *Newsmax*, *The New York Post*, *RealClearPolitics*, and *The Federalist*.⁴ The purpose of these risk ratings is to pressure advertisers into pulling their ads from these websites, defunding those who would dare to host content or opinions deemed objectionable by GDI, and, apparently, the Department and affiliated organizations.

We continue to be concerned by efforts across the federal government to censor the lawful speech of Americans and discredit legitimate criticism as mis-, dis-, or mal- information, whether through the creation of a "Disinformation Governance Board,"⁵ or labeling dissenting

¹ Gabe Kaminsky, *Disinformation Inc: State Department bankrolls group secretly blacklisting conservative media*, WASHINGTON EXAMINER (Feb. 9, 2023).

² Gabe Kaminsky, *Disinformation Inc: Meet the groups hauling in cash to secretly blacklist conservative news*, WASHINGTON EXAMINER (Feb. 9, 2023).

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ See Letter from James Comer, Ranking Member, Comm. on Oversight & Reform to Alejandro Mayorkas, Sec'y, U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security (Apr. 29, 2022).

opinions as threats to critical infrastructure.⁶ The federal government should not be censoring free speech nor policing what news outlets Americans choose to consume. And taxpayer funds should never be given to third parties with the intent that they be used to censor lawful speech or abridge the freedom of the press.

To enable oversight of the Department's administration of funds flowing to organizations working to censor lawful speech and suppress press freedoms, please provide the following documents and information no later than March 9, 2023:

1. All documents and communications regarding any grant or other funding administered by the Department or organizations funded by the Department used to suppress so-called mis-, dis-, or mal- information of individuals or news organizations within the United States from January 20, 2021 to the present;
2. All documents and communications regarding any grant or other funding administered by the Department or organizations funded by the Department issued to the Global Disinformation Index;
3. All documents and communications between any Department employee, contractor, grantee, and any other individual, whether within or outside the federal government, referring or relating to any efforts to suppress so-called mis-, dis-, or mal- information uttered or hosted by any individual or organization within the United States;
4. All documents and communications sufficient to show the identities of any Department employees, contractors, or grantees whose duties included, at any point, encouraging a third party to take action against any individual or organization within the United States uttering or hosting content considered mis-, dis-, or mal- information by the Department or organizations funded by the Department.

Additionally, please make arrangements to schedule a briefing with Committee staff on this matter as soon as possible, but no later than March 2, 2023.

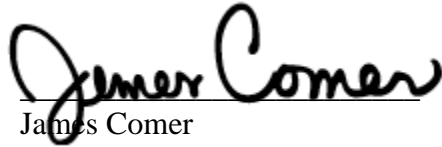
Attached are instructions for producing the documents and information to the Committee. If you have any questions, contact the Committee on Oversight and Accountability Majority staff at 202-225-5074. The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

⁶ See Letter from James Comer, Ranking Member, Comm. on Oversight & Reform to Alejandro Mayorkas, Sec'y, U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security (Nov. 2, 2022).

The Honorable Secretary Blinken
February 23, 2023
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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "J" and "C".

James Comer
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Accountability

cc: The Honorable Jamie Raskin, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability