

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074

MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<https://oversight.house.gov>

October 25, 2024

Mr. Steven Brill & Mr. Gordon Crovitz  
Co-CEOs and Co-Editors-In-Chief  
NewsGuard  
25 W. 52nd Street, 15th Floor  
New York, NY 10019

Dear Mr. Brill and Mr. Crovitz:

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is continuing to investigate the impact of NewsGuard on protected First Amendment speech and its potential to serve as a non-transparent agent of censorship campaigns. Our investigation has particularly focused on abuse of government authority to censor American citizens under the guise of protecting them from so-called misinformation. The Committee first wrote to you on June 13, 2024, seeking information on NewsGuard's business relationships with government entities, NewsGuard's policies related to bias and conflicts of interest, and how it may have impacted the delegitimization of factually accurate information.<sup>1</sup> The Committee writes today to seek additional documents and communications from NewsGuard related to all past and present contracts with or grants administered by federal government agencies or any other government entity, including foreign governments.

The protection of First Amendment rights of American citizens is paramount and attempts by government actors to infringe on those rights is dangerous and misguided. Indeed, recent comments by John Kerry, a former senior official in the Biden-Harris Administration and former Secretary of State, that "...our First Amendment stands as a major block to be able to just ... hammer it out of existence"<sup>2</sup> indicates that tendencies toward censorship and speech restrictions and government entanglement with censorship may have support from senior government officials.

The Committee's initial letter requested, among other items, "Complete versions of all current and past contracts with government entities." As an initial accommodation, the Committee accepted some documents and information from NewsGuard that were partially responsive to the request, including information regarding work performed for the Department of

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from James Comer, Chairman, Committee on Oversight and Accountability to Mr. Steven Brill & Mr. Gordon Crovitz, Co-CEOs and Co-Editors-In-Chief, NewsGuard (June 13, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Turley, *John Kerry says First Amendment is the enemy, as elites try to stamp out free speech*, NEW YORK POST (October 2, 2024).

Defense, the Joint Research Centre of the European Union, and the Global Engagement Center.<sup>3</sup> NewsGuard also provided a briefing for Committee staff, which revealed additional work or collaboration with both the Cyber National Mission Force within U.S. Cyber Command and the State Department.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, Committee staff were led to believe that the creation of a NewsGuard product was close in time to a request for a similar product made to NewsGuard by the Defense Innovation Unit of the Department of Defense.<sup>5</sup>

These wide-ranging connections with various government agencies are taking place as the government is rapidly expanding into the censorship sphere. For example, one search of government grants and contracts from 2016 through 2023 revealed that there were 538 separate grants and 36 different government contracts specifically to address “misinformation” and “disinformation.”<sup>6</sup> Additional reporting, collectively known as the Twitter Files, showcase intelligence agencies’ interest in colluding with private companies and make our requests for full and complete disclosure on all government relationships with NewsGuard all the more pressing.<sup>7</sup>

To assist the Committee’s ongoing investigation into this matter, please provide the following additional documents and communications, covering the time period September 1, 2018 to the present, on or before November 8, 2024:

1. All documents and communications between NewsGuard and the Department of Defense, including, but not limited to, the Defense Innovation Unit, U.S. Cyber Command, or the Cyber National Mission Force, relating to any contract, grant, or other work performed by NewsGuard for or in conjunction with the Department of Defense;
2. All documents and communications between NewsGuard and the Department of State, including, but not limited to, the Global Engagement Center, relating to any contract, grant, or other work performed by NewsGuard for or in conjunction with the Department of State; and
3. All documents and communications between NewsGuard and any federal department or agency relating to any contract, grant, or other work performed by NewsGuard for or in conjunction with any federal department or agency or component thereof.

If you have any questions, contact the Committee on Oversight and Accountability Majority staff at 202-225-5074. Attached are instructions for responding to the Committee’s request.

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<sup>3</sup> Letter from Michael Bopp, representing NewsGuard, to James Comer, Chair, H. Comm. Oversight & Accountability (August 5, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Briefing from NewsGuard staff to Oversight & Accountability staff (July 12, 2024).

<sup>5</sup> Briefing from NewsGuard staff to Oversight & Accountability staff (July 12, 2024).

<sup>6</sup> Margot Cleveland, *Meet the Partisans Who Wove the Censorship Complex’s Vast and Tangled Web*, THE FEDERALIST (February 28, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Margot Cleveland, *6 Ways the Censorship Complex Silences Speech It Doesn’t Want You to Say or Hear*, THE FEDERALIST (March 1, 2023).

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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 in advance for cooperating with this inquiry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

James Comer

Chairman

Committee on Oversight and Accountability

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