

Congress of the United States  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Small Business  
2361 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-0515

September 26, 2024

Mr. Damon Wilson  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
National Endowment for Democracy  
1201 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Suite 1100  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mr. Wilson:

The Committee on Small Business (Committee) appreciates your interest in its recent interim staff report titled “Small Business: Instruments and Casualties of the Censorship-Industrial Complex” (Report) and writes in response to your letter on behalf of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), delivered on September 18, 2024 (Letter). In this Letter, the NED seeks to “correct the record” regarding one of the findings of the Committee’s Report, and asserts that, specifically, the NED has not “violated its international restrictions by collaborating with fact-checking entities in assessing domestic press businesses’ admission to a credibility organization” (Finding).<sup>1</sup>

The Letter claims the Report alleges “that NED is funding programs and activities targeting the United States domestically, specifically programming by the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) and the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN).”<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to this assertion, the Report does not allege that the NED provided any funding to Poynter Institute or its IFCN. The Report discusses Poynter/IFCN funding only by the Global Engagement Center (GEC). The Report’s reference to the NED’s association with the IFCN, and the very event upon which the Finding is based, is the below email in the associated FakeNewsSci list serv from then-NED personnel:

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Damon Wilson, President and CEO, National Endowment for Democracy, to Roger Williams, Chairman, H. Comm. on Small Bus., 1 (Sep. 18, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 2.

On Mon, Feb 22, 2021 at 6:30 AM Dean Jackson <mailto:[redacted]@ned.org> wrote:  
On the other hand, you really have to ask yourself if you want to be featured on a website with a history of <https://www.snopes.com/news/2018/09/06/many-daily-caller-writers-expressed-white-supremacist-views/>, next to headlines like “<https://dailycaller.com/2021/02/19/public-schools-woke-liberal-activism-critical-race-theory-teachers-unions-enrollment-private-schools/>.”

It’s something everyone has to answer for themselves. I personally wouldn’t lend them the credibility.

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The Report does not address how then-NED personnel were added to the FakeNewsSci list serv, as the Committee does not know the answer to that question, but welcomes an explanation, as the Letter did not proactively answer it. In fact, the Letter does not address this email whatsoever, despite the Finding and relevant discussion being based upon it. Given the NED’s strict international restraints, to which you refer in the Letter, the Committee hopes you would agree that the use of NED resources to send such an email about a domestic press outlet and evaluating its admission to a private credibility organization is improper and, as the Finding states, a violation of the NED’s international restrictions.

Further, the Letter improperly characterizes the Report’s assessment of the NED’s GDI funding by asserting the Report claims the funding is current. The Report clearly states that the NED’s GDI funding was terminated, going so far as to include the NED’s statement to the *Washington Examiner* about the NED’s decision to cease funding to the GDI in order to avoid the perception that the NED is engaged in any work domestically, directly or indirectly.<sup>4</sup>

The Report does not allege the funds were used for “programming focused on the United States.”<sup>5</sup> The Report instead provides evidence that, prior to administering the GDI grants, the NED was aware of the GDI’s work in the United States, as well as impacts the funding may have had domestically.<sup>6</sup> This is part of a larger conclusion of the Report that no taxpayer dollars should be given to any entity which seeks to demonetize domestic press outlets because of their lawful speech.

The Letter goes on to describe the NED’s engagement with social media platforms.<sup>7</sup> The Report’s discussion of engagement with social media companies is restricted to the GEC and Federal agencies. It does not discuss the NED’s relationship with social media companies, as the Committee was not aware of these relationships. The Committee welcomes further clarification of these engagements beyond what is noted in the Letter.

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<sup>3</sup> Email from Dean Jackson, National Endowment for Democracy, to fakenewssci@googlegroups.com (Feb. 22, 2021) (on file with the Comm.).

<sup>4</sup> H. COMM. SMALL BUS., SMALL BUSINESS: INSTRUMENTS AND CASUALTIES OF THE CENSORSHIP-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX, 34-35 (Sep. 2024); Gabe Kaminsky, *Disinformation Inc: State Department-backed group cuts ties with group blacklisting conservative news*, THE WASH. EXAMINER (Feb. 20, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Damon Wilson, President and CEO, National Endowment for Democracy, to Roger Williams, Chairman, H. Comm. on Small Bus., 2 (Sep. 18, 2024).

<sup>6</sup> H. COMM. SMALL BUS., SMALL BUSINESS: INSTRUMENTS AND CASUALTIES OF THE CENSORSHIP-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX, 35 (Sep. 2024).

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Damon Wilson, President and CEO, National Endowment for Democracy, to Roger Williams, Chairman, H. Comm. on Small Bus., 3 (Sep. 18, 2024).

The Committee welcomes a briefing to discuss the information in the Report as was offered in the Letter, and in the interim, asks that the following questions be addressed:

1. How was NED personnel added to the FakeNewsSci Google Group list serv?
2. Did any other NED personnel participate in the FakeNewsSci Google Group list serv using NED resources?
3. Is there any correspondence, other than the email shown above, between NED personnel and the FakeNewsSci Google Group list serv? If so, provide them.
4. Does the NED find it appropriate for its personnel to serve as an assessor for IFCN's Code of Principles given its assessments of domestic press outlets?
5. Has NED personnel ever submitted social media posts or accounts to social media companies in the context of flagging them as potentially violative of terms of service or similar policies? If so, please provide all relevant documentation.

The Committee requests responses to these questions prior to its briefing with the NED so that a productive conversation may be had during the briefing about any further findings. To schedule the delivery of your response or ask any related follow-up questions, please contact the Committee on Small Business Staff at (202) 225-5821. The Committee on Small Business has broad authority to investigate "problems of all types of small business" under House Rule X. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

Sincerely,



Roger Williams  
Chairman  
Committee on Small Business

cc: The Honorable Nydia M. Velasquez, Ranking Member  
Committee on Small Business