

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

January 8, 2024

Mr. James P. Rubin
Special Envoy and Coordinator
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Rubin:

The Committee on Small Business, Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Regulations (Committee) writes to further its investigation into government censorship and revenue interference of American small businesses by proxy. It is clear that the Global Engagement Center (GEC) funded third parties who discredit certain small businesses (and their owners) based on their political speech and viewpoints.¹ These third parties pressure advertising and social media companies to remove certain businesses' online advertisements, disallow ad placement on businesses' websites, remove online speech, and ban accounts entirely.² The federal government cannot circumvent constitutional protections by using private actors to accomplish what the State itself is prohibited from doing.³

This investigation stemmed in part from report of federal funding of companies such as the Global Disinformation Index (GDI), which published a blacklist of news organizations that painted certain conservative-leaning media companies as "risky" and therefore unreliable, discouraging advertising deals, and ultimately interfering with their ability to compete.⁴ Two such media companies, The Daily Wire and The Federalist, are parties to *State of Texas et al. v. U.S. Dept. of State et al.*, a federal lawsuit recently filed on this precise issue, with you and the GEC as named defendants.⁵ The GEC has funded a myriad of companies that label beliefs

¹ Letter from Roger Williams, *et al.*, Chairman, H. Comm. on Small Bus., to James P. Rubin, Special Envoy and Coordinator, Global Engagement Center, U.S. Dep't of State (Jun. 7, 2023).

² *Id.*

³ *Norwood v. Harrison*, 413 U.S. 455, 465 (1973), "The government "may not induce, encourage, or promote private persons to accomplish what it is constitutionally forbidden to accomplish."; *Biden v. Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia Univ.*, 141 S. Ct. 1220, 1226 (2021), A private entity thus violates the First Amendment "if the government coerces or induces it to take action the government itself would not be permitted to do, such as censor expression of a lawful viewpoint." (Thomas, J., concurring).

⁴ Gabe Kaminsky, *Disinformation Inc: State Department bankrolls group secretly blacklisting conservative media*, THE WASH. EXAMINER (Feb. 9, 2023); Letter from Roger Williams, *et al.*, Chairman, H. Comm. on Small Bus., to James P. Rubin, Special Envoy and Coordinator, Global Engagement Center, U.S. Dep't of State (Jun. 7, 2023).

⁵ *The State of Texas, et. al v. U.S. Dept. of State, et al.*, No. 6:23-cv-00609-JDK (E.D. Tex. Dec. 6, 2023).

running afoul of the radical left’s agenda as “disinformation.”⁶ Despite your recent claim that “[w]e are not in the business of deciding what is true or not true”, the third parties receiving GEC funds focus overwhelmingly on “right-wing misinformation” rather than misinformation across the political spectrum. It is clear the Biden Administration considers itself the arbiter of truth.⁷

Upon review of the GEC’s initial production to the Committee, the Committee has become gravely concerned about the government’s extensive, increased funding of entities deeply engaged in surveillance and censorship of Americans.⁸ The GEC’s Congressional mandate states that “[n]one of the funds authorized to be appropriated or otherwise made available . . . shall be used for purposes **other than countering foreign propaganda and misinformation**” (emphasis added).⁹ The GEC maintains that they do not take action against American citizens or their businesses. You were recently quoted to say “[w]hat we do not do is examine or analyze the U.S. information space.”¹⁰ However, as revealed by investigative journalism such as the *Twitter Files*, the GEC has sent lists of “foreign” disinformation accounts to social media companies calling for their removal that, in fact, contained American profiles.¹¹ While the GEC’s production to the Committee assigned a primary country for each award’s objective, evidence gives reason to believe that these awards may not have been used solely for foreign purposes.¹²

The work performed by the entities the GEC is funding is cause for concern. For example, Moonshot CVE—a GEC award recipient for FY 2018 and FY 2022—self-reports monitoring online activity in the United States, engaging with tech companies to “blacklist” and report content, and has even monitored the search history of service members and reported their geolocation.¹³ The Atlantic Council of the United States, Inc. (Atlantic Council), a think tank that runs the Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab), received GEC awards in at least FY 2021 and FY 2023, in addition to a slew of other federal funding.¹⁴ DFRLab was a main partner for Stanford’s “Election Integrity Partnership” and the “Virality Project”, which have come under a great deal of scrutiny over their mass surveillance and censorship activities in their attempt to accomplish what “the government could not do themselves.”¹⁵ As revealed in *Twitter Files*

⁶ On file with the Committee; Matt Taibbi, *New Knowledge, The Global Engagement Center, and State-Sponsored Blacklists*, SUBSTACK (Mar. 2, 2023).

⁷ Steven Lee Myers, *State Dept. ’s Fight Against Disinformation Comes Under Attack*, THE N. Y. TIMES (Dec. 14, 2023); *Research, Monitoring, Evaluation, & Learning*, THE GLOBAL STRATEGY NETWORK LTD (last visited Dec. 18, 2023).

⁸ On file with the Committee.

⁹ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Pub. L. No. 114-328, §1287 (2016).

¹⁰ Steven Lee Myers, *State Dept. ’s Fight Against Disinformation Comes Under Attack*, THE N. Y. TIMES (Dec. 14, 2023).

¹¹ Matt Taibbi, *New Knowledge, The Global Engagement Center, and State-Sponsored Blacklists*, SUBSTACK (Mar. 2, 2023).

¹² On file with the Committee.

¹³ *Moonshot’s Annual Impact Report*, MOONSHOT CVE (2021); Susan Schmidt, et al., *Report on the Censorship-Industrial Complex: The Top 50 Organizations to Know*, RACKET NEWS (May 10, 2023).

¹⁴ USASpending.gov. Atlantic Council has received \$6.8 million from at least 23 grants from the Departments of Defense, Energy, and State.

¹⁵ Susan Schmidt, et al., *Report on the Censorship-Industrial Complex: The Top 50 Organizations to Know*, RACKET NEWS (May 10, 2023).

reporting, DFRLab also has a history of sending lists of accounts to Twitter calling for their removal, labeling them foreign disinformation actors, when the list in fact contained accounts of Americans.¹⁶

Albany Associates International, LTD (Albany Associates) received GEC funding in Fiscal Years 2018, 2019, 2022, and 2023.¹⁷ Albany Associates has produced research categorizing beliefs of Americans, including sitting U.S. congressmen, as “disinformation” and insists that “partnerships between government, academia, and tech at a national and local level” are required to combat said “disinformation.”¹⁸ Another award recipient, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), claims that it fights disinformation by “collaborating with governments, legislatures, civil society, the media, technology platforms, academia, business, and the creative sector.”¹⁹

Throughout the course of this investigation, the Committee has developed additional concerns over whether the GEC maintains proper oversight over the selection and actions of subawardees/subgrantees. This Committee aims to ensure the GEC is not only aware of where taxpayer dollars are going, but that the GEC is screening and overseeing the work delegated by their award recipients.

Further, the GEC’s initial production to the Committee appears to be incomplete. The Committee requested an “unredacted list of *all* GEC *grant* recipients and associated award numbers from FY 2019 – present” (emphasis added).²⁰ It appears there has been **complete omission of dozens of awards** from the GEC’s production. Given some of these awards are publicly viewable on USASpending.gov, it is the Committee’s belief that these awards exist and were omitted without explanation and in violation of the Committee’s request. In addition, the GEC produced only cooperative agreements and failed to include any project grants, despite specific phrasing used by the Committee in its production request.

The GEC award recipients revealed in its partial production have caused enough concern that the Committee is requesting more detailed information to understand the reality and scope of what these companies are using taxpayer dollars for. The GEC’s initial production was provided to the Committee over five months after the requested due date of June 21, 2023. The result was a five-page spreadsheet; there is no reason the GEC would need one month per page of production. The Committee needs all relevant documents to ensure all American small businesses are able to compete online without interference from the federal government. Therefore, the Committee reiterates our original requests, copied and pasted below for your

¹⁶ Matt Taibbi, *New Knowledge, The Global Engagement Center, and State-Sponsored Blacklists*, SUBSTACK (Mar. 2, 2023).

¹⁷ On file with the Committee.

¹⁸ Racially and Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism Messaging in the West: A Horizon Scanning Report, ALBANY ASSOCIATES INTERNATIONAL, LTD (last visited Dec. 14, 2023).

¹⁹ Laura Jewett, *INFO/TEGRITY: NDI’s Approach to Countering Disinformation*, THE NAT’L DEMOCRATIC INST. FOR INT’L AFFAIRS (May 28, 2020).


²⁰ Letter from Roger Williams, *et al.*, Chairman, H. Comm. on Small Bus., to James P. Rubin, Special Envoy and Coordinator, Global Engagement Center, U.S. Dep’t of State (Jun. 7, 2023).

convenience, and requests additional documents and information based off of new details provided by the GEC as soon as possible but no later than January 22, 2024.


1. Unredacted list of all GEC grant recipients and associated award numbers from FY 2019 – present, in addition to any other awards, project grants, or cooperative agreements that were omitted from the December 3 partial production.
2. Unredacted copies of all contracts and related documentation (including communications describing scope of work) for every GEC award, project grant, and cooperative agreement from FY 2018 – present.
3. A list of all subawardees/subgrantees and any pertinent contracts for FY 2018 – present.
4. A description of GEC’s process for screening, approving, and overseeing subawardees/subgrantees.
5. A list of all GEC contractors for FY 2018 – present and unredacted copies of all associated contracts.
6. A list of all GEC subcontractors for FY 2018 – present.
7. A copy of GEC’s internal file named “2023.02.14 GEC-GDI-BLACKLIST.docx.”

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



Beth Van Duyne
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight,
Investigations, and Regulations

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

The Honorable Kweisi Mfume, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Regulations