

ORAL ARGUMENT SCHEDULED FOR SEPTEMBER 22, 2025**Nos. 25-5144, 25-5145, 25-5150, 25-5151**

IN THE

**United States Court of Appeals
for the District of Columbia Circuit**

PATSY WIDAKUSWARA, ET AL.,
PLAINTIFFS-APPELLEES,

v.

KARI LAKE, IN HER OFFICIAL CAPACITY AS SENIOR ADVISOR TO THE ACTING
CEO OF THE U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA, ET AL.,
DEFENDANTS-APPELLANTS,

MICHAEL ABRAMOWITZ, IN HIS OFFICIAL CAPACITY AS DIRECTOR OF VOICE OF
AMERICA, ET AL.,
PLAINTIFFS-APPELLEES,

v.

KARI LAKE, IN HER OFFICIAL CAPACITY AS SENIOR ADVISOR TO THE ACTING
CEO OF THE U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA, ET AL.,
DEFENDANTS-APPELLANTS,

MIDDLE EAST BROADCASTING NETWORKS, INC.,
PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE,

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, ET AL.,
DEFENDANTS-APPELLANTS,

RADIO FREE ASIA,
PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE,

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, ET AL.,
DEFENDANTS-APPELLANTS,

On Appeals from the United States District Court for the District of Columbia
Nos. 25-cv-1015, 25-cv-887, 25-cv-966, 25-cv-907 (Hon. Royce C. Lamberth)

**BRIEF OF FORMER DIRECTORS OF VOICE OF AMERICA
AS *AMICI CURIAE* IN SUPPORT OF APPELLEES AND AFFIRMANCE**

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**CERTIFICATE AS TO PARTIES, RULINGS,
RELATED CASES & STATUTES**

Pursuant to D.C. Circuit Rule 28(a)(1), *Amici Curiae* former directors of Voice of America certify as follows:

A. Parties and *Amici*

Except for the *amici* filing this brief, all parties, intervenors, and *amici* appearing before the district court and in this Court are listed in the Brief for Defendants-Appellants.

B. Rulings Under Review

References to the rulings at issue appear in the Briefs for Defendants-Appellants.

C. Related Cases

Amici are not aware of any related cases within the meaning of D.C. Circuit Rule 28(a)(1)(C) other than those identified in the Briefs for Defendants-Appellants.

/s/ Gregory Craig

Gregory Craig

Counsel for *Amici Curiae*

Former Directors of Voice of America

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Pursuant to Rules 26.1 and 29(a) of the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure and D.C. Circuit Rule 26.1, *Amici Curiae* certify that they are each a natural person and as such no further Rule 26.1 disclosure statement is required.

/s/ Gregory Craig

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**STATEMENT REGARDING CONSENT TO FILE
AND SEPARATE BRIEFING**

All parties have consented to the filing of this brief.

Pursuant to D.C. Circuit Rule 29(d), *Amici* certify that a separate brief is necessary to present the important issues covered by this brief. *Amici* are not aware of any other *amicus* brief addressing these issues—in many respects because the issues as presented in this brief draw principally from the lived experiences of the *Amici* themselves. Such issues therefore do not duplicate the legal arguments presented by the parties. *Amici* further certify pursuant to D.C. Circuit Rule 29(d) that joinder in a single brief with other *amici* would be impracticable.

**STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP AND
FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

No party's counsel authored any part of this brief, nor did any party or party's counsel contribute any money used or intended to fund the preparation or submission of this brief. No person other than *amici curiae* and their counsel contributed any money that was used or intended to fund the preparation or submission of this brief.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATE AS TO PARTIES, RULINGS, RELATED CASES & STATUTES	i
DISCLOSURE STATEMENT	ii
STATEMENT REGARDING CONSENT TO FILE AND SEPARATE BRIEFING	iii
STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP AND FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
TABLE OF AUTHORITIES	vi
INTERESTS OF <i>AMICI CURIAE</i>	1
SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT	2
ARGUMENT	3
I. FOR OVER 80 YEARS, CONGRESS HAS REAFFIRMED AND REINFORCED THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE THAT THE VOICE OF AMERICA SHALL BE A FREE AND INDEPENDENT VOICE.	3
A. Key Legislative Developments in VOA’s History	4
B. Congressional Commitment to VOA’s Mission and Principles	8
II. <i>AMICI</i> ENGAGED DIRECTLY WITH CONGRESS TO ADVANCE A COMMON MISSION: TO BUILD TRUST AROUND THE GLOBE THROUGH CREDIBLE REPORTING.....	13
III. <i>AMICI</i> OBSERVED FIRSTHAND THE IMPACT OF TRUSTWORTHY REPORTING ON AMERICA’S FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS.....	16
A. The Voice of America reports <i>on</i> America, whether the news is good or bad.....	16
B. VOA’s cultural diplomacy shared with other nations a vision of American ideals they could aspire to.	18
C. VOA breached barriers of isolation and violence alike.	21
CONCLUSION	29
CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE.....	31
CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE	32
APPENDIX A: LIST OF <i>AMICI</i>	33
APPENDIX B: LETTER FROM THE FORMER DIRECTORS OF VOICE OF AMERICA TO THE HOUSE AND SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEES	39

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES¹

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INTERESTS OF *AMICI CURIAE*¹

Amici are former directors of Voice of America. They served their country during Presidential administrations of both parties, and they engaged with elected representatives from every region of the nation in pursuit of the lofty aims set forth by Congress in the entity’s charter: “[T]he Voice of America must win the attention and respect of listeners.” 22 U.S.C. § 6202(c).

Amici have traveled to every corner of the globe in that service. In those travels, *Amici* have been received by publics the world over who in many cases not only listened to, but relied on Voice of America as their only accessible form of accurate, reliable reporting—even of the events in their own countries. *Amici* have heard of the impact of Voice of America from heads of state and defectors from authoritarian regimes. Their broadcasts have crossed boundaries American diplomats could not—traversing the Iron Curtain, the Khyber Pass, and the 38th Parallel; penetrating bloody coups d’état and the front lines of ground invasions; surmounting physical isolation and sophisticated digital censors—to reach an oft frightened, frustrated public yearning for truth.

Amici have heard what the Voice of America can tell the freedom-loving people of the world: The truth matters. They have an interest that America continue to broadcast that message.

¹ The individual *amici* are further identified at Appendix A.

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

From the first broadcast of Voice of America (VOA) to German citizens seeking reprieve from Nazi fascism, VOA has committed itself to one mission above all others: Tell the truth, no matter what. Over the ensuing eight decades, Congress has codified, reaffirmed, and entrenched this core principle again and again. As demonstrated by review of the legislative history of VOA's governing statutes, Congress has played an active and continuous role in the life of VOA, enshrining in law the principles of journalistic integrity and freedom from bias, regardless of party or prevailing administration. And while VOA's governance structure has changed over time with these several statutes, Congress has never wavered in protecting these foundational principles.

Amici former directors of VOA have in their lived experiences engaged directly with members of Congress to implement that vision and strive for the ideals set forth by Congress in the charter. This engagement reflected longstanding bipartisan Congressional support for the mission. Hundreds of millions of listeners and viewers—many tuning in at their own jeopardy—attest to the import of an unyielding dedication to accountability and accuracy, free from political influence in coverage. Without such independence, VOA would never have reached such a massive global audience—one that relies on the agency for unbiased information it cannot receive elsewhere.

That credibility has allowed VOA to advance American national security interests immeasurably, in reaching those who often would otherwise have no way of knowing what was happening around the world, or even in their own countries. These efforts penetrated isolated nations and purveyors of exclusive state-controlled media, including both America's largest authoritarian adversaries and smaller nations fomenting extremism and unrest. In all corners of the world where people seek truth, there the Voice of America has endeavored to reach, to assure, to inform, and—in freeing from the fetters of misinformation—to liberate.

ARGUMENT

I. FOR OVER 80 YEARS, CONGRESS HAS REAFFIRMED AND REINFORCED THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE THAT THE VOICE OF AMERICA SHALL BE A FREE AND INDEPENDENT VOICE.

VOA traces its origins to 1942, when it began broadcasting during World War II to counter Nazi propaganda by providing accurate and unbiased news and information. On February 1, 1942, German citizens heard—in German:

This is a voice speaking from America. . . . Daily at this time we shall speak to you about America and the war.

The news may be good or bad; we shall tell you the truth.²

Since the inception of VOA, thousands of its reporters and staff have dedicated themselves to this mission, delivering reliable and independent news.

² *VOA's first broadcast from New York City to Germany*, VOICE OF AMERICA PUBLIC RELATIONS, <https://www.insidevoa.com/a/2365229.html>.

And over more than eight ensuing decades, Congress has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to VOA's mission, recognizing VOA's key role in serving U.S. foreign policy and national interests.

A. Key Legislative Developments in VOA's History

In 1948, Congress enacted the United States Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (known as the "Smith-Mundt Act"), which codified VOA as an information service responsible for disseminating information abroad about the United States, its people, and its policies. *See* Pub. L. No. 80-402, tit. I, § 2(1), 62 Stat. 6 (1948). In 1953, VOA became the largest component of the U.S. Information Agency ("USIA"), an agency created to oversee U.S. international broadcasting. Reorganization Plan No. 8 of 1953, 3 C.F.R. 642 (1953); Exec. Order No. 10,477, 3 C.F.R. 958 (1949-1953). In 1976, Congress codified the VOA Charter, emphasizing that "[t]he long-range interests of the United States are served by communicating directly with the peoples of the world by radio. To be effective, the Voice of America must win the attention and respect of listeners" through adherence to principles of journalistic integrity and independence. As set forth in the Charter:

- (1) VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.
- (2) VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced

and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions.

(3) VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinion on these policies.

See Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 1977, Pub. L. No. 94-350, § 503, 90 Stat. 823, 831-32 (1976).

Throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century, Congress continued to refine the structure and oversight of VOA. In 1994, Congress enacted the United States International Broadcasting Act of 1994 (“IBA”), Pub. L. No. 103-236, §§ 304, 307, 108 Stat. 432, 434–36 (1994), which established within the USIA the International Broadcasting Bureau (“IBB” or “the Bureau”), and a bipartisan Broadcasting Board of Governors (“BBG” or “the Board”), with authority to oversee VOA and other broadcasting entities. Consistent with the VOA Charter, the IBA laid out a set of standards and principles to govern U.S. international broadcasting, including the requirement that such broadcasting meet the “highest professional standards of broadcast journalism” and produce news that is “reliable and authoritative, accurate, objective, and comprehensive[.]” *Id.* § 303(a)-(b). As a testament to Congress’s commitment to maintain the integrity and independence of VOA and its sister networks, Congress mandated that the BBG and the USIA Director must “respect the professional independence and integrity of the International Broadcasting Bureau, its broadcasting services, and grantees.” *Id.* § 305(c) .

In 1998, Congress abolished the USIA and divided oversight of VOA and its sister networks between the Department of State and the BBG, which then became an independent agency responsible for all U.S. government-supported international broadcasting. *See* Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998, Pub. L. No. 105-277, Div. G, §§ 1311-1312, 112 Stat. 2681-776 (1998). In doing so, Congress reiterated the U.S. policy of promoting the freedom of information and emphasized that “international broadcasting is, and should remain, an essential instrument of United States foreign policy.” *Id.* § 1321(4). Journalistic integrity and the “firewall” separating the broadcasting networks from political interference remained a key concern to Congress, which required the Secretary of State and the BBG to “respect the professional independence and integrity of the International Broadcasting Bureau, its broadcasting services, and the grantees of the Board.” *Id.* § 1323(i). The instruction was straightforward: The Inspector General of the Department of State and the Foreign Service “shall respect the journalistic integrity of all the broadcasters . . . and may not evaluate the philosophical or political perspectives reflected in the content of broadcasts.” *Id.* § 1322.

In 2016, Congress made structural changes to the governance of U.S. international broadcasting once more, establishing the Chief Executive Officer for the BBG (renamed in 2018 as the United States Agency for Global Media (“USAGM”)) and the International Broadcasting Advisory Board (“IBAB”).

National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Pub. L. No. 114-328, §§ 304, 306, 130 Stat. 2000, 2549-51 (2016). Again, the statute reaffirmed the decades-old principle that “[t]he Secretary of State and the Chief Executive Officer, in carrying out their functions, shall respect the professional independence and integrity of the Agency, its broadcasting services, and the grantees of the Agency.” 22 U.S.C. § 6204(b) (2025).³ *Amici* would therefore never have imagined the head of USAGM hiring and firing VOA staff, and otherwise making unilateral coverage determinations.⁴

In 2021, Congress enacted additional reforms to limit the powers of the USAGM CEO and strengthen safeguards for journalistic integrity and independence. Here, Congress explicitly referenced the necessity of “editorial independence.” William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 1299Q(b), 134 Stat. 3388, 4020-21 (2021). Moreover, Congress directed the IBAB to act as a check on the USAGM

³ In his signing statement, President Obama made clear that the statute “retain[ed] the longstanding statutory firewall, protecting against interference with and maintaining the professional independence of the agency’s journalists and broadcasters and thus their credibility as sources of independent news and information.” President Obama’s Statement on Signing the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, the White House Office of the Press Secretary, *available at* <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/12/23/statement-president-signing-national-defense-authorization-act-fiscal> (Dec. 23, 2016).

⁴ See Appendix B: Letter From Former VOA Directors to Congress.

CEO, ensuring that the latter “fully respect[] the professional integrity and editorial independence of United States Agency for Global Media broadcasters, networks, and grantees” and that the broadcasters “adhere to the highest professional standards and ethics of journalism, including taking necessary actions to uphold professional standards to produce consistently reliable and authoritative, accurate, objective, and comprehensive news and information.” *Id.* § 1299Q(d).

B. Congressional Commitment to VOA’s Mission and Principles

Across eight decades, shifting geopolitical realities, and multiple reorganizations, legislators of both parties have taken active part in VOA’s development and ensured that its core missions and principles remain intact. Through the enactments outlined above, Congress has affirmed and reinforced three inter-locking themes central to VOA and other USAGM networks: (1) journalistic integrity; (2) the “firewall” insulating editorial decisions from political influence and bias; and (3) the indispensability of VOA and its sister networks to U.S. foreign policy and national interests. Indeed, extensive congressional records confirm and strengthen these concepts.

1. Journalistic Integrity

Congressional language from every era underscores that VOA’s credibility—and thus its strategic value—depends on scrupulous adherence to professional news standards, balance, and journalistic integrity. As Representative Karl E. Mundt (R-SD)—sponsor of the 1948 Smith-Mundt Act—explained, “[i]t must be emphasized

over and over again, that [VOA] is not a propaganda program [but] simply a program of presenting the facts about freedom to the peoples of the world.” 94 CONG. REC. 2, 2152 (1948).

Nearly three decades later, when reporting on the codification of the VOA Charter, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee explained the centrality of truthful and balanced reporting to VOA’s mission: “[B]roadcasts of VOA can be effective only if they have the respect of their listeners, and such respect can be built only through a tradition of accurate and balanced news presentation.” S. REP. NO. 94-703, at 15 (1976). The same principle dominates the history of the 1994 IBA and its subsequent amendments, which are replete with evidence of Congress’s intent to preserve and promote journalistic integrity as a foundational element of VOA’s operations. *See, e.g.*, S. REP. NO. 103-107, at 10 (1993) (“The committee believes that the proposed framework protects the independence and journalistic integrity of the broadcasting entities.”); H.R. REP. NO. 103-482, at 202 (1994) (Conf. Rep.) (“The committee of conference is also mindful of the need for journalists and broadcasters to maintain their professional independence in order to produce factual, unbiased and balanced work products.”); 140 CONG. REC. 6, 8819 (1994) (statement of Howard Berman (D-CA)) (“In reorganizing international broadcasting, we take the Voice of America charter and we include those standards in a broader charter for all our broadcasting, including the requirement for a

balanced and comprehensive projection of U.S. thought and institutions reflecting the diversity of U.S. culture and society.”); 166 CONG. REC. 218, H8783 (daily ed. Dec. 21, 2020) (“The Act requires funds appropriated under this heading to be made available in accordance with the principles and standards set forth in [the IBA.] The application of this requirement shall be done in a manner that is, at a minimum, consistent with . . . the highest standards of professional journalism[.]”).

2. *“Firewall” Protecting Editorial Independence*

Hand-in-hand with journalistic professionalism and integrity is the concept of a “firewall” that shields newsrooms from political influence and bias. During the 1993 deliberations over the IBA, ensuring editorial independence in U.S. international broadcasting was as a central concern for lawmakers. *See* S. REP. NO. 103-107, at 10 (1993) (“The committee believes that the proposed framework protects the independence . . . of the broadcasting entities[.]”); H.R. REP. NO. 103-482, at 202 (1994) (Conf. Rep.) (“The committee of conference is also mindful of the need for journalists and broadcasters to maintain their professional independence in order to produce factual, unbiased and balanced work products. . . . The conferees are concerned that journalistic independence of broadcasters would be endangered if the Inspector General were to second guess working journalists.”). Later, the 1998 restructuring of U.S. international broadcasting, and the 2016 and 2021 amendments to the IBA, all repeated the mandate that the Secretary of State

and the BBG/USAGM CEO “respect the professional independence and integrity” of the broadcasters. Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 § 1323(i). Congressmembers’ statements reiterated these principles. For example, in 1995, during debates over a proposed consolidation of USIA networks, Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME) expressed concerns about “maintaining the independence and integrity of the broadcasting functions of radio” and noted that the “critical firewall” would help maintain such independence and integrity. 141 CONG. REC. 126, S11060 (daily ed. Aug. 1, 1995). And in 2019, Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) passionately advocated for VOA’s journalistic independence from politics:

America should consistently be a voice for freedom. . . . Now, to be clear, we don’t ask journalists to promote the viewpoint of the United States government. There are plenty of countries in the world where governments run their media, and the media is little more than a propaganda outlet Instead, we believe in a different kind of press—one that aligns with American principles. It’s a testament to our system of government that we encourage and protect dissent—that we encourage and protect a free media—because freedom depends upon a free media.⁵

3. Service to U.S. Foreign Policy and National Interests

Finally, Congress has recognized VOA and its sister networks as essential instruments supporting American foreign policy and national interests. The 1976 amendment to the Smith-Mundt Act acknowledged that direct radio

⁵ Senator Ted Cruz, *Sen. Cruz Delivers Remarks at the U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA's 2019 Media for Democracy Forum* (May 7, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eeMhxonHv1o>.

communications with global audiences serve “[t]he long-range interests of the United States[.]” Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 1977 § 206. In 1994, the House Foreign Affairs Committee hailed VOA’s “vital contribution to the collapse of communism” and concluded that continued broadcasting “remain[s] important to the national interest of the United States.” H.R. REP. NO. 103-126, at 45 (1993).

The congressional judgment that “international broadcasting is, and should remain, an essential instrument of United States foreign policy” has not wavered. Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 § 1321(4). For example, in a 2009 hearing on the soft power of American international broadcasting, Rep. Ed Royce (R-CA) spoke at length on the “war of ideas” then being fought between American programming and “Sharia radio” in Afghanistan, noting that “the free flow of information is a mortal threat” to extremist regimes like al-Qaeda. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America: Soft Power and the Free Flow of Information*, 111th Cong. 4-6 (2009) (“2009 VOA Soft Power Hearing”). Whether countering Nazi propaganda in 1942, Soviet disinformation during the Cold War, or authoritarian and extremist narratives today, Congress has always regarded VOA’s balanced, independent journalism as integral to advancing freedom and safeguarding American interests.

II. *AMICI* ENGAGED DIRECTLY WITH CONGRESS TO ADVANCE A COMMON MISSION: TO BUILD TRUST AROUND THE GLOBE THROUGH CREDIBLE REPORTING.

While the legislative history makes plain that VOA is a creature of Congress, the lived experiences of the *Amici* former directors confirmed this fact week in and week out. *Amici* regularly appeared before Congressional subcommittees to discuss VOA's accomplishments, challenges, and aims. And time and again, when called upon, Congress rose to meet VOA in a common mission.

For example, during Mary Bitterman's tenure as Director (1980-81) at the height of the Cold War, when VOA's Russian service came under scrutiny, Rep. John Buchanan (R-AL) spoke passionately in support of VOA before the House of Representatives. 126 Cong. Rec. 32615 (Dec. 5, 1980) (statement of Rep. Buchanan) ("I have listened to witness after witness describe the value of the Voice's broadcasts into the Soviet Union and the extent to which these individuals have gone just to hear what the Voice has to say."). Rep. Buchanan urged that "the Voice is doing an essential job in telling the story of the great reality of this country and providing information to the peoples of many lands who thirst for truth." *Id.* He then introduced into the Congressional Record two letters: one from Director Bitterman responding to a critique of VOA, and one from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn to VOA's Russian Service, in which one of the titans of modern Russian literature pleaded (as translated):

“[I]t is almost impossible to imagine correctly the course of basic international events by information given out within the Soviet Union. . . . That is why your broadcasts are of such exceptionally informative worth. And I am writing this letter to ask that you on no account discontinue this series, but continue it further, year after year.”

Id. at 32616.

More than three decades later, when Russian forces under President Vladimir Putin invaded Crimea in February 2014, VOA Director David Ensor swiftly turned to engaged appropriations committee members to secure additional funding for programming in Ukraine.⁶ And, as it had in 1980, Congress recognized that people of the Eastern part of Ukraine “thirst[ed] for truth,” for they could not rely on sources broadcast from Russia or its regional allies.

But Congress’s engagement with VOA was not limited to the dais of the Capitol or Rayburn buildings—members engaged with VOA programming on a

⁶ See U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA, *Ukrainians Turn to VOA and RFE/RL for Accurate Information on Developments*, (Apr. 18, 2014), <https://www.usagm.gov/2014/04/18/ukrainians-turn-to-voa-and-rferl-for-accurate-information-on-developments/#:~:text=Who%20we%20are-.Ukrainians%20Turn%20to%20VOA%20and%20RFE/RL%20for%20Accurate%20Information,those%20from%20visitors%20in%20Ukraine>; OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, REVIEW OF THE U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA RESPONSE TO RUSSIA’S 2022 FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE 3 (May 2023) https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/report/report_pdf_file/isp-ib-23-14.pdf. (“Following Russia’s occupation of Crimea in March 2014, VOA and RFE/RL expanded Russian and Ukrainian language broadcasting efforts. VOA, [] had been considering eliminating the Ukrainian language service, reversed course, hiring new staff and producing additional content and live inserts for affiliate news broadcasters to complement existing programming.”).

personal level. During VOA Director Danforth Austin's tenure (2006-11), Members traversed the two blocks from Capitol Hill to VOA headquarters to observe the verification and processing of the more than 300 videos being uploaded weekly from the streets of Tehran, documenting firsthand Iranian protests and their suppression. VOA also invited Members from both sides of the aisle to appear on VOA programming, and they regularly enjoyed such appearances. *See, e.g., 2009 VOA Soft Power Hearing* (statement of Rep. John Boozman (R-AR)) (recognizing the invitation and participation of himself and other Members).

Political actors' engagement with VOA at times prompted the former directors to remind them of VOA's Charter, independence, and balance. For example, during Director Charles "Chase" Untermeyer's tenure (1991-93), he defended VOA's Chinese service against calls for sharper, more strident coverage of the Chinese government. To be credible with the Chinese population, the broadcasts needed to convey fact-based news, not anti-communist propaganda. Later, Director Austin engaged openly with Members of the house, including Rep. Robert Wexler (D-FL) on VOA's coverage of Iran and regime change in the Balkans, cautioning that VOA's role was not to advocate for one regime or another: "I want to be careful here. We don't engage in the conduct of foreign policy. We leave that to the professionals at the State Department and elsewhere." *2009 VOA Soft Power Hearing* at 26. Director Austin clarified that apart from any particular

policy aim, these regions had “information needs” that VOA strove to meet so that America could maintain a “direct dialogue with these people.” *Id.*

During Director David Ensor’s tenure (2011-15), top officials in the State Department suggested that VOA could provide more favorable coverage of a particular East African nation, having received complaints from its government about VOA’s coverage of its human rights record. But Director Ensor pushed back: If a nation wanted more favorable coverage of its human rights record, it must improve that record. Separately, Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) regularly met with Director Ensor seeking to influence VOA’s coverage of Iran. During these meetings, Director Ensor welcomed specific examples of coverage requiring correction, but resisted suggestions that VOA should push its coverage in one direction or another. As Director Ensor understood, VOA was simply in the business of telling the truth about Iran, and letting the informed populace draw their own conclusions about the Ayatollah’s regime.

III. *AMICI* OBSERVED FIRSTHAND THE IMPACT OF TRUSTWORTHY REPORTING ON AMERICA’S FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS.

A. The Voice of America reports *on* America, whether the news is good or bad.

It is a fundamental and guiding principle of Voice of America that, as promised in that first broadcast to the citizens of Germany, it cover America’s *own* news, regardless of the light in which it may cast America. This was canon even

before Congress codified the Charter in 1976. All living former directors are acutely familiar with the decision in 1973, under Director Kenneth Giddens, to broadcast to the world the Watergate scandal and America's proceedings to impeach its own president.⁷

Just a handful of years later, Director Mary Bitterman had occasion of her own to reaffirm this principle. Sen. Jesse Helms, a Member with deep interest in VOA, reached out to Director Bitterman to challenge VOA's coverage of the riots in Liberty City, Miami following the Mariel Boatlift mass migration event from Cuba and the acquittal of police officers in a racially-charged beating death. Sen. Helms probed the necessity of airing America's "dirty linen" to the world. But Director Bitterman responded to the effect that, it is only by telling the truth—dirty laundry and all—that we can build credibility and trust with the world. Moreover, that approach soon bore unexpected fruit: Part of VOA's coverage of the riots followed ministers of different faiths coming together to tend to the city's needs across racial and religious lines, coverage which showed the world America's values, character, and soul. But such powerful demonstration of collective healing would not have been possible without first reporting on a people collective in hurt.

⁷ See Mark Lewis, *How VOA Reported Sex Charges*, Nieman Reports (June 15, 1998) (observing in retrospect that "VOA coverage of the Watergate scandal increased its reputation for honesty").

The decades that followed brought regular occasion for VOA to shine its light on America, but perhaps none so pointed as the coverage, under Director Evelyn Lieberman, of the sex scandal and subsequent impeachment of President Clinton.⁸

As reported contemporaneously:

[Director Lieberman] ordered all VOA writers, editors and correspondents to treat the Lewinsky story like any other news story and to follow it wherever it led. . . . There has been no special policy guidance, as it's called in the government, for VOA coverage of the story. Neither the White House nor State Department nor any U.S. Embassy abroad nor any member of Congress nor VOA's parent organization, the U.S. Information Agency, has intervened with guidance, suggestions or complaints.⁹

That the Voice of America can speak about even *these* aspects of America to the world—to those who have never heard their own state-controlled media report a loss or failure or target not achieved—conveys the very essence of freed thought and the aspiration of the American democratic project.

B. VOA's cultural diplomacy shared with other nations a vision of American ideals they could aspire to.

The former directors of VOA each experienced the profound impact of American arts conveyed via VOA broadcasts on foreign audiences. The most enduring example remains the Jazz Hour hosted by Willis Conover, who broadcast

⁸ *See id.* (describing VOA's coverage in "reporting the story credibly to millions of non-Americans").

⁹ *Id.*

on VOA for more than forty years, and who Director Sanford Ungar (1999-2001) has remarked may have “be[en] the second-best-known American in the world, after whoever happened to be the U.S. president at the time.”¹⁰

Mr. Conover’s influence on the imaginations of oppressed peoples around the world is difficult to capture. By way of example, however, the great jazz musician Arturo Sandoval has remarked that when he lived in Cuba, VOA was “the only way we ha[d] to hear that kind of music and to be connected with the music we love,” and that jazz music’s symbolic connection to America was so great that he was jailed for listening to “the voice of enemies.”¹¹

Anti-communist dissidents, including those within Czechoslovakia’s musicians’ union, were also known to listen in secret to Conover’s broadcasts, which united those who would seed the Velvet Revolution. Vaclav Havel later recalled of that time, “We experienced ourselves what importance the message of . . . the Voice of America . . . at the time of the totalitarian regime has had.”¹²

¹⁰ Sanford J. Ungar, *Pitch Imperfect*, FOREIGN AFFAIRS (May/June 2005), <https://universityofleeds.github.io/philtaylorpapers/vp0128b2.html>.

¹¹ See *Transcript, From Cuba to America, Arturo Sandoval Is an Ambassador for Jazz*, NPR (Aug. 20, 2013), <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/213801653?ft=nprml&f=213801653>.

¹² See *News Digest*, CZECH THE NEWS (Oct., 2002), https://mzv.gov.cz/public/ae/ef/67/166993_14903_ctn0210.htm. See also *Velvet Revolution Inspires and Disappoints*, VOA (Nov. 27, 2009), <https://www.voanews.com/a/velvet-revolution-inspires-and-disappoints->

Jazz may have represented a uniquely American improvisation, spirit, and ingenuity, but it was not alone among American arts globalized by VOA, because American country western music found new adoration in East Asia through the efforts of longtime VOA broadcaster Judy Massa. In the experience of the former directors, Massa's music programs, particularly in the 80s and 90s, connected America with a larger world enamored with stories of individualism, romance, and a great American mythos.

Beyond music, the cultural impact of VOA reaches even more fundamentally to proliferation of the English language. Through VOA's "Special English" programming, with a limited vocabulary and deliberate presentation, generations of people learned how to engage with the globalized world that lay beyond the walls of authoritarianism. As but one example, former Director Geoffrey Cowan (1994-96) was told by the head of a major bank in China that he could never have attained such a sophisticated position had he not learned English through VOA.

In the years during and following the Cold War, the U.S. developed a cultural footprint all around the world. But in places where other Western media was

[74662707/368318.html](https://www.74662707/368318.html) (discussing Czech actor's participation in VOA during Velvet Revolution).

unavailable, it was through VOA that people nonetheless admired and emulated American culture and ideals.

C. VOA breached barriers of isolation and violence alike.

Over more than eight decades of VOA, countless journalists, engineers, and staff risked danger to themselves and their families to deliver on VOA's mission of bringing reliable news to the world, wherever it was needed most.

Some of the most unstable episodes in a nation's history are when its people need the news most dearly. The former directors oversaw coverage of violent coups, spanning Liberia in 1980 (Director Bitterman) to Zimbabwe in 2017 (Director Amanda Bennett). For one pointed example, under Director Untermeyer's tenure, the U.S. government grappled with concerns over the legitimacy of Haiti's government following a violent coup and its potential fallout both in Haiti and in the U.S. Amid public uncertainty and panic, VOA's Creole-language broadcasts provided critical, fact-based information directly to the Haitian people. Despite external pressures—including direct criticism from U.S. officials who feared that certain interviews, like that of exiled Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, might be provocative—VOA insisted on broadcasting accurate news and diverse perspectives to calm restless supporters of the exiled leader.¹³

¹³ See J.F.O. McAllister, *Haiti: Lives on Hold*, TIME (Feb. 1, 1993), <https://time.com/archive/6722283/haiti-lives-on-hold/> (describing Aristide's urging of calm in a special Creole broadcast interview with VOA); Jane Sutton,

Later in the decade, when Afghanistan broke into civil war during Director Ungar's tenure, he supported a brave Islamabad correspondent who requested permission to traverse the Khyber Pass—even when the U.S. generally prohibited government employees from entering Afghanistan. In the face of scrutiny from the State Department, Director Ungar defended this journalist and his journalistic mission for its importance to the people of Afghanistan. Contemporaneous independent surveys reported *nearly 70%* of Afghan men regularly listened to VOA in Pashtu or Dari.¹⁴

Beyond individual violent episodes, VOA has long broadcast into and reported the news in countries that have tried to insulate their people from the truth, including the principal authoritarian powers of Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.

Iran: Across the tenures of former directors, the Iranian people have for decades provided an important if not predominant audience for VOA—despite its prohibition under the laws of Iran. Amid stories of large groups gathering across the country to listen to VOA, Director Ungar received photos of Iranians with tin

Aristide Makes Appeal as Boats Flee Haiti, Death Toll Rises, UPI (Nov. 22, 1991), <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1991/11/22/Aristide-makes-appeal-as-boats-flee-Haiti-death-toll-rises/5390690786000/> (discussing the peril of fleeing Haitians and Aristide's message of non-violent resistance).

¹⁴ Geoffrey Cowan, *Why the Voice of America Remains a Vital Force in The World*, FIGUEROA PRESS 10 (March 2017).

pie plates hanging out of windows to serve as makeshift receivers. Kenneth Tomlinson, then-chairman of the BBG, remarked in 2003, “It’s amazing that in a country where viewing of satellite television is illegal, American-produced news shows in Persian can attract 12 percent viewership.”¹⁵ Later estimates placed the audience share even higher. *See 2009 VOA Soft Power Hearing* at 16 (nearly 30% of Iranian households reported watching VOA’s Persian television program every week).

The Iranian people demonstrated the significance of VOA through their active participation in programming. By 2009, Iranian viewers uploaded 300 videos per week to VOA sites, including in some cases footage of violent suppression of protestors. The dramatic footage VOA then shared (after verification) prompted an audience message typical of many VOA received: “Me and my family need your broadcasts to find out what is going on in our country. It

¹⁵ *See VOA-TV Gains Large Audience in Iran*, U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA (Nov. 19, 2003), <https://www.usagm.gov/2003/11/19/voa-tv-gains-large-audience-in-iran/#:~:text=Voice%20of%20America%E2%80%99s%20%28VOA%29%20Persian%20television%20programs%2C%20including%20a%20daily%20show%20that%20focuses%20on%20sought%20after%20news%20and%20information%2C%20are%20reaching%20a%20remarkable%2012%20percent%20of%20Iranians%20over%20the%20age%20of%2018%2C%20a,months%20before%20the%20survey%2C%20along%20with%20two%20separate%20weekly%20Persian%20language%20programs%2C%20are%20seen%20by%20about%20four%20million%20people%20each%20week%20via%20direct%20to%20home%20satellite%2C%20according%20to%20a%20nationwide%20telephone%20survey%20taken%20in%20September.>

is very important and we do not know what is going on without you.” 2009 *VOA Soft Power Hearing* at 19.

USSR and Russia. During Director Bitterman’s tenure, VOA learned its Polish service broadcasts were being jammed shortly after VOA covered the Lech Wałęsa-led Solidarity movement. Director Bitterman and her staff responded by continuing to broadcast—slowly and repetitively—to try to convey fragmented messages however they could. They would come to learn in the years to follow just how impactful those unceasing efforts were. In a 2002 interview, Wałęsa himself would recount:

[I]t is difficult to imagine what would have happened if it were not for the Voice of America and other sources with the help of which the true information squeezed through, which showed a different point of view, which said that we are not alone and that something is happening in the country—because our mass media did not do that.¹⁶

The events of August 1991, during the attempted coup against Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, provide another powerful testament to VOA’s journalistic integrity. While under house arrest in a Crimean dacha, Gorbachev himself relied on VOA’s Russian-language broadcasts to stay informed about the

¹⁶ FreeMediaOnline, *Lech Walesa on Historic Role of Voice of America in Poland*, YouTube (uploaded Sept. 28, 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3Uhl39YBTc&t=5s>.

rapidly evolving situation.¹⁷ Gorbachev’s choice to tune in to VOA—rather than more overtly propagandistic outlets—demonstrates the high regard for VOA’s reputation for accuracy, comprehensiveness, and reliability.

Just two years later, Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin highlighted the impact of these qualities in a speech to U.S. international broadcasters:

It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of your contribution to the destruction of the totalitarian regime in the former Soviet Union. No less important are the efforts which you are making today to inform radio listeners in Russia about events in our country and overseas.¹⁸

Nor did efforts to bring truth to the people of Russia cease with the Cold War. Within 48 hours of Russia’s 2014 invasion of Crimea during Director Ensor’s tenure, VOA dramatically ramped up broadcast offerings in Russian and Ukrainian, and within weeks began broadcasting the now wildly popular “Current Time” television program. Later, in Amanda Bennett’s tenure as CEO of USAGM, “Current Time” Russia would reach 5.9% of Russians—and nearly 9% of young adults—despite active digital suppression by the Russian government.¹⁹

¹⁷ Thomas Rosenstiel, *Captive Gorbachev Tuned In to the BBC*, *Voice of America*, Los Angeles Times (Aug. 23, 1991), <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-08-23-mn-1029-story.html>.

¹⁸ Gene Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty: An Insider’s Memoir of Radio Liberty* xiii, 239 (1999).

¹⁹ Current Time: About the Service, <https://about.rferl.org/service/current-time/#:~:text=86.8M,their%20thoughts%20on%20current%20issues>.

North Korea. The highest-ranking diplomat to defect from North Korea, former deputy Ambassador to the North Korean embassy in the UK, Thae Yong-Ho, commented on the importance of VOA's media programming for those in North Korea.²⁰ During Director Bennett's tenure in 2017, Yong-Ho relayed in a VOA broadcast with its Seoul correspondent:

[W]hen I was in North Korea as a diplomat in Foreign Ministry, I read every morning and afternoon the materials . . . of VOA. . . . I think it is very important that VOA should further strengthen its activity, and also its contents so that, one day, [the] VOA is remembered by North Korean people as . . . the main player who contributed a lot for the reunification of the Korean peninsula.²¹

VOA's efforts to reach north of the 38th Parallel have required long-developing journalistic diplomacy. During Director Austin's tenure, VOA secured agreement for an ambitious effort: partnering with South Korea to broadcast radio into North Korea, using South Korean towers along the border. This effort continued to flourish in ensuing years, later including broadcast television.²²

²⁰ U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA, *Highest Ranking North Korean Defector Says USIM Plays Important Role*, (Mar. 17, 2017) <https://www.usagm.gov/2017/03/17/highest-ranking-north-korean-defector-says-usim-plays-important-role/#:~:text=The%20North%20Korean%20regime%20also,reunification%20of%20the%20Korean%20peninsula.%E2%80%9D>.

²¹ *Id.*

²² Joel Simon, *A Secret Program Allowed VOA to Broadcast Television into North Korea. Now It's Gone*, Columbia Journalism Review (June 26, 2025), <https://www.cjr.org/news/trump-lake-secret-program-voice-of-america-north-korea-tv-broadcast-gone.php>.

China. The former directors all know about VOA’s deep reach into communist China. Director Bitterman—who arranged for the first exchange of broadcasters between VOA and China—was told by a Chinese minister of culture that the VOA audience in China “measured not in the tens of millions, but the hundreds of millions.” That reach only expanded following VOA’s unyielding coverage of the Tiananmen Square protests, during which VOA served as the primary source of information for pro-democracy demonstrators gathered in the square.²³

Beyond the authoritarian powers, though, many of VOA’s greatest successes are in nations with smaller populations, land masses, or less prevalent U.S. media attention.

African Nations. Beyond the coups and acute events described above, VOA is a critical lifeline to people of many diverse African nations. In one vivid episode, during an Ethiopia Airlines flight, the pilot learned Director Austin was onboard and sought a personal audience—midflight—so that he could thank Director Austin for VOA’s work. The captain explained that VOA was the only way Ethiopian people learned—and trusted—what was happening in their own country, and he urged Austin to continue the broadcasts. During the former directors’ tenures

²³ See Xiao Yu, *Uncovered Tapes a Time Capsule of China’s Tiananmen Square Massacre*, VOA (June 2, 2024), <https://www.voanews.com/a/uncovered-tapes-a-time-capsule-of-china-s-tiananmen-square-massacre/7642862.html>.

beginning in the mid-1990s, Ethiopia counted for among the highest shares of VOA's national audiences.

VOA's role was not only pertinent in military times, but also critical during public health crises. During the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, VOA organized a series of broadcasts in collaboration with the BBC.²⁴ The broadcasts on TV, radio, and digital formats supported people from Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, providing clear safety mechanisms for self-protection from the disease.

Albania. The Albanian service represents a remarkable example of VOA's success in penetrating the most isolated places on the globe. In an episode shortly after the Iron Curtain fell and Albania opened to the world, Secretary of State James Baker visited and commanded a large crowd. But he realized he traveled with an even bigger star—the head of the VOA Albanian service, Elez Biberaj, who for years had broadcast radio into an isolated Albania without certainty of whom his message was reaching.²⁵ Albania's second democratically elected president, Sali

²⁴ U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA, *BBC and VOA Join Force to Fight Ebola*, (Nov. 28, 2014) <https://www.insidevoa.com/a/bbc-and-voa-join-forces-to-fight-ebola/2538330.html>.

²⁵ See VOICE OF AMERICA PUBLIC RELATIONS, *VOA Albanian Service Marks 70th Anniversary*, (May 7, 2013), <https://www.insidevoa.com/a/voa-albanian-service-marks-70th-anniversary/1656568.html> (“[F]ormer U.S. Ambassador to Albania William Ryerson recounted preparations for then U.S. Secretary of State James Baker's 1991 visit to Albania . . . Ryerson said the first question he was asked after learning of the visit was whether Elez Biberaj, then Director of the Albanian Service, would be coming. ‘Baker schmacker, the important person was the Voice of America person,’ Ryerson recalled to loud applause from the audience”).

Berisha, later claimed to Director Untermeyer that he had learned English through painstaking attention to VOA and BBC broadcasts that had been jammed by Soviet-era authorities.

Those earlier efforts endeared generations of Albanian people to VOA. *See 2009 VOA Soft Power Hearing* at 16 (reporting that 64% of all people in Kosovo watched VOA television programming). Albania's fourth post-Soviet President, Alfred Moisiu, later said that "[a]ll the politicians in Albania, and all the people who are interested to follow the events, watch and listen to VOA." *Id.* at 20.

CONCLUSION

As Congress has long recognized and reaffirmed in setting forth VOA's charter, the Voice of America is a profound asset for America in its battles against authoritarianism, misinformation, and propaganda. And as discussed in the brief for Plaintiffs-Appellees, USAGM's unlawful, destructive actions arbitrarily and capriciously contravened that Congressional directive. Against an 80-year backdrop of congressional engagement and legislative consensus, consultation with Congress before trying to eviscerate VOA would have been advisable. Appellees chose a different path: to defy the law and ignore Congress. *Amici* urge the Court to affirm the preliminary injunction.

Dated: July 22, 2025

Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

I hereby certify that this brief complies with the type-volume limitations of Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 27(d)(2) because it contains 6,487 words, excluding the exempted portions under Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 32(f) and D.C. Circuit Rule 32(e)(1). This brief complies with the typeface and type style requirements of the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure 32(a)(5)-(6) because it has been prepared in a proportionally spaced typeface using Microsoft Word in 14-point Times New Roman font.

/s/ Jack C. Smith
Jack C. Smith

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on this date, the foregoing document was electronically filed in this matter with the Clerk of Court, using the ECF system, which sent notification of such filing to all counsel of record.

/s/ Jack C. Smith

Jack C. Smith

July 22, 2025

APPENDIX A: LIST OF AMICI

Mary G.F. Bitterman served as 15th Director of VOA between 1980 and 1981, where she played a key leadership role in international broadcasting and public diplomacy. She is currently President of The Bernard Osher Foundation, a national philanthropic organization supporting higher education, lifelong learning, and the arts. Dr. Bitterman's distinguished career includes serving as President and CEO of The James Irvine Foundation and KQED, as well as Executive Director of the Hawaii Public Broadcasting Authority. She has also chaired the boards of the East-West Center, America's Public Television Stations, the Commonwealth Club of California, PBS, and the PBS Foundation, and has served on the boards of numerous major corporations and nonprofit organizations. A recipient of the Ralph Lowell Award for her outstanding contributions to public media, Dr. Bitterman holds a B.A. from Santa Clara University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Modern European History from Bryn Mawr College, as well as honorary degrees and awards from Dominican University of California, Santa Clara University, the University of Richmond, and the University of Southern Maine.

Charles "Chase" Untermeyer served as the 21st Director of VOA from August 1991 to January 1993. Appointed by President George H. W. Bush, Untermeyer led VOA during a pivotal period following the end of the Cold War, overseeing the agency's global broadcasting operations at a time of significant

geopolitical change. Notably, VOA began radio broadcasts in Kurdish to listeners in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey, and, in partnership with WorldNet, launched a jointly produced television program in Ukraine called Window on America. Untermeyer also hosted a weekly news interview show, “On the Line,” broadcast worldwide on both VOA and WorldNet. Prior to VOA, Untermeyer held a variety of senior positions in government, including Assistant to the President and Director of Presidential Personnel at the White House, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs under President Reagan, and Executive Assistant to Vice President George H. W. Bush. Untermeyer served as U.S. Ambassador to Qatar from 2004 to 2007. He is currently a professor of practice at the Hobby School of Public Affairs at the University of Houston and ambassador-in-residence in the history department at Texas Tech University.

Geoffrey Cowan served as the 22nd Director of VOA from 1994 to 1996. For more than 40 years, he has been a leader in communications and public policy. He has served as an attorney, director of UCLA’s Communications Law program, Dean of USC’s Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, and former president of The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands, California, which serves as a retreat center for meetings of heads of state and prominent scholars. Cowan’s father Louis served as VOA’s second director from 1943-45. From 1979 to 1984 he was a member of the Board of Directors of the Corporation for Public

Broadcasting, where he was involved in the growth of National Public Radio. While at VOA, Cowan was credited for increasing the number of language services from 47 to 53 and for the creation of the new international talk show, *Talk to America*, the *China Forum* radio-TV simulcast in Mandarin, and the Farsi-language *Roundtable With You* for an Iranian audience. In 1994 VOA became the first international broadcaster to offer its material via the internet.

Sanford J. Ungar served as the 24th Director of VOA from 1999 to 2001. Prior to becoming VOA Director, Ungar served as Dean of the School of Communication at American University and had an extensive and varied career as an international journalist. He has worked at *Foreign Policy* magazine, *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic* magazine, UPI, *Newsweek* magazine, and NPR, where he co-hosted “All Things Considered.” During his tenure as Director, VOA launched its main portal, voanews.com. After leaving VOA, Ungar was president of Goucher College in Towson, Maryland from 2001 to 2014. Ungar then joined Georgetown University, where he is director of The Free Speech Project. He has taught undergraduate seminars on free speech at both Georgetown University and Harvard College.

Robert Reilly served as the 25th Director of VOA from 2001-2002, and as its 29th from 2020 to 2021. Reilly has enjoyed a long career in public service, from military service to the USIA to the White House as a special assistant to President

Reagan. Reilly served for a decade in VOA's Office of Policy before his elevation to director. In that role, he hosted the program *On the Line*, during which he interviewed officials and scholars. Reflecting music's historically integral role at VOA, Reilly instituted a series of live noontime concerts with notable artists, open to the public and broadcast globally. He also presided over the 60th anniversary celebration at Voice of America that was headlined by President George W. Bush, who said to a worldwide audience, "Through a world war and a cold war, in crisis and in calm, the Voice of America has added to the momentum of freedom." Between his two tenures as director, Reilly also served in the Department of Defense, taught at the National Defense University, and served as director of the Westminster Institute.

Danforth Austin served as the 27th Director of VOA from 2006 to 2011. During his tenure as director, Mr. Austin grew VOA's audiences across all platforms, oversaw critical internal reorganizations and developed programming strategies to reach multi-national audiences through new-media platforms. From August 2007 to September 2010, Mr. Austin also served as functional head of the International Broadcasting Bureau ("IBB"). Prior to his involvement with VOA and IBB, Mr. Austin had a 36-year career with Dow Jones & Co. and its flagship publication, The Wall Street Journal, rising through the Journal's news department ranks from staff reporter to Deputy National Editor and Special Reports Editor and,

later, as General Manager of the Journal's business operations and as chairman and chief executive officer of Dow Jones's community news publishing arm. He also has served on the boards of various non-profit organizations devoted to journalism in the U.S. and abroad.

David Ensor is a diplomat, executive, and journalist, who served as the 28th director of VOA from June 2011 through April 2015. At VOA, he worked with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty to co-found the Russian-language television program *Current Time* (which grew into a network), and he developed a partnership with the BBC to fight Ebola in Africa, pooling resources, data, and content to provide information more effectively and efficiently. Under his leadership, VOA launched new television programs in at least 12 languages, and instituted a "digital first" approach to news production. During his time with VOA, audiences increased nearly 40 percent. Prior to joining VOA, Ensor worked as the director of communications and public diplomacy at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. Previously, he was a journalist for thirty years, reporting for NPR, ABC, and CNN. He was a television correspondent for ABC News from 1980 to 1998 and served as CNN's national security correspondent from 1998 to 2006. After leaving Voice of America, Ensor was a Shorenstein Resident Fellow at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. In 2017 he was named Director of the Project for

Media and National Security at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Amanda Bennett served as the 29th Director of VOA from March 2016 through June 2020. She is a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, investigative journalist and editor. During Amanda Bennett's tenure as the director, the network's radio, television, and online audience grew by nearly 109 million people to 280.9 million a week. In addition, the agency adopted a new tagline, "A Free Press Matters," opened a Silicon Valley bureau to expand technology reporting, launched an investigative journalism unit and fact-checking team, established VOA's first ever press freedom beat, created a dedicated blog and website for international students, launched new programming, including new refugee- and women-focused television and radio shows, and introduced bridge editors across the agency to foster content sharing. After her tenure as director, she served as the CEO of the U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA (USAGM) from September 2022 through January 2025. During Bennett's tenure as CEO, USAGM's networks reached a record 427 million weekly measured global audience in Fiscal Year 2024. Prior to these roles, she was an Executive Editor with Bloomberg News, editor of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, editor of the *Herald-Leader*, and managing editor for *The Oregonian*. Bennett also served as a *Wall Street Journal* reporter for more than 20 years.

APPENDIX B:
LETTER FROM THE FORMER DIRECTORS OF VOICE OF AMERICA
TO THE HOUSE AND SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEES

March 24, 2025

The Honorable Lindsey Graham (Chair), Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

The Honorable Brian Schatz (Ranking Member), Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart (Chair), House Appropriations Subcommittee on National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs

The Honorable Lois Frankel (Ranking Member), House Appropriations Subcommittee on National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs

Dear Senators and Congressman,

As former directors of the Voice of America appointed to serve under presidents from both parties, we urge you to act quickly to reverse the plans announced by the current Administration to eliminate one of the most cost-effective instruments of American soft power.

As you know, an executive order has directed that VOA and an array of federal offices “be eliminated to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law.” About 1,000 journalists have been placed on indefinite administrative leave. Those who showed up to work to broadcast programs were locked out of the building. The agreements which fund our sister organizations, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, have also been terminated.

We understand that the international broadcasting services of America’s adversaries in Russia and China are already taking up the slack, increasing the investment in their language services and in some cases, taking over time slots on local stations around the world that we have abandoned.

All these steps were made without consultation with Congress, which has voted repeatedly to support these networks and has had no hand in the plans to shut them down.

The orders amount to a gift to China, Iran, Russia and other oppressive regimes around the world.

Since its foundation in 1942, VOA has expanded from shortwave radio to every type of communication known to man—including television, radio, internet, social media—with a current weekly audience of 361 million people in 49 languages. In Africa, for example, Beijing invests billions in information programs through CGTN, Xinhua, and China Daily, while Russia's RT and Sputnik push anti-American propaganda. Gutting VOA would cede an entire continent to America's adversaries and allow authoritarian regimes to control the narrative. VOA operates with extraordinary efficiency in Africa: just 200 staff produce 59 radio shows and 31 TV programs, in addition to managing 16 websites and dozens of social media accounts in 16 languages.

While nearly all VOA staff remain in the limbo of administrative leave, all of the agency's personal service contractors have already been terminated. These contract staffers, who represent almost half of the workforce, tend to be more recently hired journalists, and they often work in the VOA's most prominent language services, including Russian, Chinese, Persian and Korean. They are also among VOA's most vulnerable employees: many of them lack U.S. citizenship yet would be jailed if they were forced to return to their home countries, specifically because of their work for VOA. They tend to be the most recently arrived in America, with fewer alternatives to a VOA salary and a J-1 visa.

VOA's mission is critical to the United States' interests, and VOA's personnel are hard-working professionals who put themselves at risk for their work. Both deserve your support. We urge Congress to act to save VOA and act to help it keep this critical group of VOA journalists working. Through these actions, the United States can continue to project truthful journalism and America's values around the world. Moreover, it operates under a legislative charter adopted by Congress in 1976 that requires its programming to be "accurate, objective, and comprehensive." While there are (and always will be) ways in which VOA can be streamlined and improved, by law, VOA's news programs are not allowed to be false or unbalanced. If they are, that law can be enforced.

With a mission to provide reliable news and to tell America's story, VOA has a profound impact. We urge you to take urgent steps to restore this vital agency.

Sincerely,

Mary Bitterman (1980-1981)
Richard W. Carlson (1986-1991)
Chase Untermeyer (1991-1993)
Geoffrey Cowan (1994-1996)
Sanford Ungar (1999-2001)
Robert Reilly (2001-2002, 2020-2021)
Danforth Austin (2006-2011)
David Ensor (2011-2015)
Amanda Bennett (2016-2020)