

NOMINATION

TUESDAY, JUNE 7, 2022

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:03 p.m., in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Tim Kaine presiding.

Present: Senators Kaine [presiding], Menendez, Schatz, Portman, and Barrasso.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. TIM KAINE, U.S. SENATOR FROM VIRGINIA

Senator KAINE. Good afternoon.

The hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will now come to order.

We are here to consider an important nominee, Amanda Bennett, to be Chief Executive Officer of the U.S. Agency for Global Media.

Ms. Bennett, I want to congratulate you on the nomination and I want to thank you for your willingness to serve and also thank you especially to members of the family who will also bear the burdens and sacrifices of your service.

Let me begin by introducing our nominee. Amanda Bennett is an author, investigative journalist, and editor. Most recently, she served as director of Voice of America.

Prior to her service at Voice of America she had a lengthy career in journalism, including as executive editor of Bloomberg News, editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer. She also served as a Wall Street Journal reporter for over two decades and a contributing columnist for the Washington Post.

Ms. Bennett shared the 1997 Pulitzer Prize for her reporting with Wall Street Journal colleagues. She is a graduate of Harvard College.

I want to congratulate you again on the nomination. Representing the U.S. and the American people is an honor, privilege, and I am sure, based on your impressive professional background, you will serve with distinction.

I am pleased to be asked to chair this nomination hearing for the CEO of the U.S. Agency for Global Media, which is an important post that is only gaining more importance in a world where information and disinformation is so important.

The U.S. Agency for Global Media has undergone great change over the last decade, most notably through the creation of a permanent CEO position at the head of the agency.

Meanwhile, global media consumption has changed rapidly with the rise of social media and messaging technology, while traditional media institutions have experienced a loss of audience and a loss of influence.

Regardless of how the agency is structured, it is clear that its mission of providing balanced and objective media to societies without a free press has never been more important.

The current crackdown in Russia on voices opposing the illegal invasion of Ukraine demonstrates how fragile the right to free expression is in so many parts of the world and how quickly the flow of free information can be stopped by governments.

How the U.S. Agency for Global Media balances its mission with other directives, broadly advancing U.S. foreign policy objectives, is an enduring challenge for the agency and I hope we can explore that today.

The committee looks forward to hearing from you today, Ms. Bennett. I look forward to working with you, and I want to now turn to the ranking member of this committee, Senator Barrasso, for his opening remarks.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN BARRASSO,
U.S. SENATOR FROM WYOMING**

Senator BARRASSO. Thanks so much, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for holding this very important committee hearing today. The committee is going to examine the nomination of Amanda Bennett to be the Chief Executive Officer of the U.S. Agency for Global Media.

I want to congratulate you on the nomination for this important position and extend a warm welcome to your friends as well as your family.

Amanda has a long and distinguished career in journalism, as you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, over 20 years served as a reporter at the Wall Street Journal, editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer in Philadelphia, the Herald Leader in Lexington, Kentucky, the Oregonian in Portland, and the Bloomberg News in New York City.

She is a Pulitzer Prize-winning author and investigative journalist and an editor. She also has experience working at the agency as the director of the Voice of America for over four years. With her background and experience, Amanda will add value and much needed direction to the U.S. Agency on Global Media.

At a time when press freedom and democracy are starting to decline, U.S. international broadcasting has a very important role to play. With authoritarian governments shut down the news and censor their people, this agency can give credible and timely and accurate information.

There is a need to provide the international community with balanced and objective information. This is especially true in areas of the world where disinformation, propaganda, and terrorist ideology dominate the news.

It is also important to remember this agency is tasked with promoting foreign policy goals and national security interests of the United States. This position has an impact on our nation's interests across the globe.

The U.S. Agency for Global Media supervises and oversees a global broadcast network reaching over 350 million people. Its pro-

gramming is distributed via radio, television, internet, and other news media broadcasts in 62 languages.

Should you serve our nation in this important position, it is critical that you continue to provide strong leadership and stewardship of American taxpayer resources, demonstrate professionalism and good judgment, and vigorously work to advance the priorities of the United States.

During your testimony, I hope you will lay out your plan for the efficiencies, improvements, and strategic direction for the agency.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Kaine. Thank you, Senator Barrasso.

We will now proceed with Ms. Bennett. I would ask you to provide your opening remarks.

STATEMENT OF AMANDA BENNETT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, NOMINATED TO BE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you so much, Chairman Kaine and Ranking Member Barrasso, and members of the committee for welcoming me here today.

It is such an honor to be considered by this committee for the position of Chief Executive Officer for the U.S. Agency for Global Media, and I thank members and their staff for taking the time to meet with me.

I would like to take a moment to recognize behind me my husband, Don Graham, and my son, Terry Foley, as well as to acknowledge my daughter, Georgia Foley, stepchildren Liza, Laura, Will, and Molly, my late husband, Terence Foley, and my mentors, Sandra Mims Rowe and Chuck Camp, and I am so grateful for their generosity, their support, and their encouragement.

We are at a critical moment in history. Journalism and public diplomacy alike are targeted as never before by authoritarian regimes using myths and disinformation to undermine those seeking credible, fact-based, and unbiased coverage of the world around them.

Journalism has been my life. At 11 years old, I published my first newspaper story about the day my father told me that my newborn sister had Down syndrome. Yesterday, she turned 60.

I began my professional career as a French-speaking journalist in Ottawa, Ontario. I spent 23 years at the Wall Street Journal, where I became only the second Wall Street Journal correspondent in China and, thus, experiencing life in an authoritarian state where journalists and sources were watched and detained.

I went on to lead newsrooms in Oregon and in Kentucky and in Pennsylvania, where I became the top editor before returning to financial journalism at Bloomberg News. I have been a reporter, an editor, a manager, and a news organization leader.

I shared two Pulitzer Prizes, including the much coveted Public Service Prize. I have also spent significant time contributing to nonprofit and journalistic and foreign policy institutions as well as mentoring the next generation of news leaders.

Most recently during my four years in public service as the director of Voice of America, I witnessed extraordinary passion and de-

votion to mission. I saw how much can be accomplished, yes, even in government by harnessing that passion to surmount obstacles.

I am a pragmatic leader and I believe organizations work best when things around them work well. At VOA, I traveled to 22 countries, witnessing the depth of China, Russia, and Iran's misinformation around the world.

But more importantly, I saw people's hunger for believable, trustworthy information and I realized that the BBC and USAGM networks were, for all practical purposes, the only free press in a huge part of the world.

If I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, I would emphasize the strong, nonpartisan nature of this agency and focus on the following priorities.

I would work to ensure that everything that USAGM does supports its mission as a stable, coordinated, efficient, and transparent organization serving its broadcasters and creating conditions in which truthful journalism can be most effectively practiced.

I would seek to accelerate the advances in technology to ensure that information can be seen and heard by the people who need it the most. Authoritarian regimes are increasingly sophisticated in blocking information and USAGM needs to become even more sophisticated in breaching those barriers. Playing catch up can no longer be our only option.

We need to look ahead to protect truthful, believable, free news and information from the increasingly rigorous attempts to block it. The best journalism and news is of no use if people cannot see and hear it.

And I would reaffirm both the mission and the firewall that underpins the worldwide credibility that USAGM broadcasters all enjoy. The firewall is essential to that credibility, ensuring editorial independence and protecting USAGM and its journalists from outside influence.

As my personal experience confronting state-controlled media taught me, there is nothing more important to USAGM than its independence. Celebrating successes is crucial as is the freedom to expose and explore flaws.

Audiences see our example of candor in exercising press freedom in a democratic society as a proof of our credibility. In so many countries people yearn for that truth, even if it is a painful truth.

I do not take this opportunity lightly nor underestimate its challenges. I am also grateful to the dedicated people at USAGM and its entities who work tirelessly in support of its mission.

If confirmed, I pledge to work with them to uphold the highest journalistic standards and work persistently to protect the safety and the privacy of both journalists and audiences worldwide.

I also commit to being accessible and transparent, and to work collaboratively within government, external stakeholders, with this committee, and all of Congress in a bipartisan fashion to ensure that USAGM has the support and resources necessary to fulfill its mission and that the agency is held accountable to its obligations.

I am grateful to the committee for considering my nomination and I look forward to answering your questions.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Bennett follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF AMANDA BENNETT

Thank you, Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and members of the committee for welcoming me here today.

It is an honor to be considered by this committee for the position of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), and I thank its Members and their staff for taking the time to meet with me.

I would like to take a moment to recognize my husband, Don Graham, and my son, Terry, here with me today, as well as acknowledge my daughter Georgia, stepchildren Liza, Laura, Will, and Molly, my late husband Terence Foley, and mentors Sandra Mims Rowe and Chuck Camp. I am grateful for their generosity, support, and encouragement.

We are at a critical moment in history. Journalism and public diplomacy alike are targeted as never before by authoritarian regimes using mis- and disinformation to undermine those seeking credible, fact-based, and unbiased coverage of the world around them.

Journalism has been my life. At 11 years old, I published my first newspaper story—about the day my father told me my newborn sister had Down Syndrome (she's now 60). I began my professional career as a French-speaking journalist in Ottawa, Ontario. I spent 23 years at The Wall Street Journal where I became only the second WSJ correspondent in China, experiencing life in an authoritarian state where journalists and sources were watched and detained. I went on to lead newsrooms in Oregon, and in Kentucky and Pennsylvania where I became the top editor, before returning to financial journalism at Bloomberg News.

I have been a reporter, editor, manager, and news organization leader. I shared two Pulitzer Prizes, including the much-coveted Public Service prize. I have also spent significant time contributing to nonprofit and journalistic and foreign-policy institutions, as well as mentoring the next generations of news leaders.

Most recently, during my four years in public service as the Director of Voice of America (VOA), I witnessed extraordinary passion and devotion to mission. I also saw how much can be accomplished—even in government—by harnessing that passion to surmount obstacles. I am a pragmatic leader and believe organizations work best when things around them work well.

At VOA, I traveled to 22 countries witnessing the depth of China, Russia, and Iran's misinformation around the world. But more importantly, I also saw people's hunger for believable, trustworthy information. I realized that the BBC and USAGM networks were, for all practical purposes, the only free press in a huge part of the world.

If I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, I would emphasize the strong non-partisan nature of this agency and focus on the following priorities. I would work to ensure that everything USAGM does supports its mission—as a stable, coordinated, efficient, and transparent organization serving its broadcasters and creating conditions in which truthful journalism can be most effectively practiced.

I would seek to accelerate advances in technology to ensure information can be seen and heard by the people who need it most. Authoritarian regimes are increasingly sophisticated in blocking information, and USAGM needs to become even more sophisticated in breaching those barriers. Playing catch-up can no longer be our only option. We need to look ahead to protect truthful, believable, free news and information from the increasingly rigorous attempts to block it. The best journalism is of no use if people cannot see or hear it.

And I would reaffirm both the mission and the firewall that underpins the worldwide credibility that USAGM's broadcasters all enjoy. The firewall is essential to that credibility, ensuring editorial independence and protecting USAGM and its journalists from outside influence. As my personal experience confronting state-controlled media taught me, there is nothing more important for USAGM than this independence. Celebrating successes is critical—as is the freedom to expose and explore flaws. Audiences see our example of candor in exercising press freedom in a democratic society, as proof of our credibility. In so many countries, people yearn for the truth—even painful truth.

I do not take this opportunity lightly, nor underestimate its challenges. I am also grateful for the dedicated people at USAGM and its entities who work tirelessly in support of its mission. If confirmed, I pledge to work with them to uphold the highest journalistic standards and work persistently to protect the safety and privacy of both journalists and audiences worldwide.

I also commit to being accessible and transparent and to work collaboratively within government, with external stakeholders, with this committee and all of Congress in a bipartisan fashion, to ensure USAGM has the support and resources necessary to fulfill its mission and that the agency is held accountable to its obligations.

I am grateful to this committee for considering my nomination, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Thank you very much.

Senator Kaine. Ms. Bennett, thank you very much for that testimony.

I have a few housekeeping questions that we ask of all nominees and I want to begin there before moving to five-minute rounds of policy questions.

So first, do you agree to appear before this committee and make officials from your office available to the committee and designated staff when invited?

Ms. Bennett. I do.

Senator Kaine. Do you agree—do you commit to keep this committee fully and currently informed about the activities under your purview?

Ms. Bennett. I do.

Senator Kaine. Do you commit to engaging in meaningful consultation while policies are being developed, not just providing notification after the fact?

Ms. Bennett. Yes, Senator, I do.

Senator Kaine. And finally, do you commit to promptly responding to requests for briefings and information requested by the committee and its designated staff?

Ms. Bennett. Yes, I do.

Senator Kaine. Thank you, Ms. Bennett.

Let me begin with a topic I wish I did not have to begin with. I would like to talk about campaigns against disinformation and how we objectively promote journalism and our own foreign policy ideas.

But I want to start off with talking about the murder of journalists. This is not something that we should have to talk to.

Jamal Khashoggi was a Virginia resident who was murdered in a state-sponsored assassination by the Saudi Arabian government. There still has not been accountability for that murder.

I read accounts that the President may meet with the leaders of Saudi Arabia, who have thus far escaped accountability. Within the last month, a prominent Al Jazeera journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh, was killed by Israeli Defense Forces in Palestine. There have been significant murders of journalists in Mexico.

We could go country after country. This is not unique to any particular left or right or kind of government. It is not unique to any continent, sadly.

But we are seeing journalists increasingly under pressure, not just having their stories suppressed or editorial content blocked but actually at risk for their very lives.

What could the U.S. Agency for Global Media do to either provide some security or at least elevate this topic in the eyes of Americans and those around the world so that we might be able to protect people practicing the craft that you have been about for your entire professional career?

Ms. Bennett. Thank you very much for that question, Senator, and I, too, wish it was something that we did not have to lead this committee with because it is clear that the situation—the security situation and the safety situation for journalists around the world

is becoming just increasingly fraught, increasingly dangerous, and protecting those journalists and not only those journalists but also the audiences and sources that work with them has got to be a high priority, and there is many things that are already being done to try and protect their security. But there are also many other things that can be done, including working on notification and digital security, and making sure that we have the most up-to-date policies and practices.

Senator KAINE. I appreciate that, and I also believe that even in the selection of content, factually accurate but scrupulously focused attention to the situation of journalists around the world who are under any kind of pressure, certainly, under any threat to their life, can have a way of elevating this in the mind's eye of the public in ways that could be helpful and I would encourage you in that way.

I do not need to kind of cite chapter and verse of challenges but I will say—and you are certainly aware of this because of your recent service on the VOA, which is one of the things, I think, makes you very, very well suited to this position—there have been challenges in morale in the employees within the USAGM.

What steps would you take, using your background not only as a journalist but as a manager—what steps would you take to slowly improve morale among leadership and staff within the agency?

Ms. BENNETT. Yes, thank you. Thank you, Senator. And I take very, very seriously not just the safety of the staff but also their morale, and one thing I found is even during the periods of the most deep, profound morale issues there was still this hunger and passion for the mission.

The first thing I would do is make sure they understand that I share that hunger and passion and that I understand what they are doing and I want to help them do it the best possible way.

And the second thing I would do is to make sure that the conditions at USAGM support them in their mission and that everything we do at USAGM is used to advance the incredibly important work that they do.

Senator KAINE. Let me ask you this question. How do you approach—and again, your VOA experience is very valuable here—how do you approach these twin missions of USAGM being completely independent, trustworthy in delivering information, also advancing U.S. foreign policy interests?

We want to do both. But we, certainly, cannot sacrifice objectivity and accuracy for the latter goal. How do you—what is your philosophy about how you accomplish both those goals?

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you, Senator.

I have never seen those goals as being in opposition. I feel that they are very similar and that modeling the values that we hold as Americans in a democratic society of free press is really an extremely powerful message about the freedoms of a democratic society.

I find that modeling these messages and also bringing truthful news and information about the world and also about American foreign policy—we are, in some parts of the world, the only source of truthful and objective news about American foreign policy, about many subjects.

I think that those two things are really very important and will continue to be so.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Ms. Bennett.

Before I hand you over to Senator Barrasso for questions, I will just reflect to a time earlier in my life. It was Christmas of 1980, Christmas Eve, and I was on my way to what I thought was going to be a celebration of Christmas with Jesuit missionaries in Honduras where I was working. But instead, our car broke down and the person I was with me said that we had to spend the night sleeping on a dirt floor in a one-room schoolhouse high in the mountains of Honduras.

But we had a radio and we could turn on Voice of America and listen to their Christmas programming. Other than everything else it was the worst Christmas Eve of my life because we only had a can of peanuts to share rather than the dinner we hoped to enjoy with others.

But Voice of America was the one bright spot of that very grim Christmas evening and I will never forget that even though it was 42 years ago.

With that, I will hand it over to Senator Barrasso.

Senator BARRASSO. Thanks so much, Mr. Chairman.

Again, congratulations on the nomination. I have a couple of questions, and I want to get into the issue of Russia and Ukraine and not just the unprovoked military attack on innocent people but also the propagand that I see being used by Russia targeting specific populations around the world.

It is a fascinating thing that I was not aware of until I really dug into this and, you know, Russia is attempting to influence and persuade African nations, interestingly enough. Evidence of its impact, clearly, shown during the vote at the United Nations on March 2nd of this year.

The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The vote was 140 to 5 demanding that Russia immediately cease its use of force against Ukraine, refrain from other—any further unlawful threat, condemned the violations, all of that.

Yet, over half of the African countries did not vote to support it. On the vote to condemn Russia's invasion, 28 African nations backed the resolution. Seventeen abstained, eight were no shows, and one nation opposed it.

We know that Russia has had an extensive propagand operation. When I met with President Zelensky in his office in Kyiv a number of weeks ago and asked what is the disappointment, he said, we expected more support out of Africa in terms of the amount of food that goes to Africa and the relationship and the friendship.

It does seem that Russian-controlled media is pushing the false narrative that Putin is the hero versus telling the truth about his brutality, his military aggression in Ukraine.

How can the United States better shed light on the atrocities and the coercive practices that are committed by countries like Russia?

Ms. BENNETT. Senator, that is an incredibly important question and one that focuses on the strength that USAGM can bring to those questions.

First off, the Russian invasion of Ukraine highlights as never before the power of information, both false information and true information.

The true information about the way that Ukraine has responded to these aggressions is very, very powerful in underlining another nation's support for it and the false information is also very important in helping maintain the aggression the way it is.

And so information is our most important asset in helping combat this.

And, Senator, I thank you for underlying the fact that the mis- and disinformation that come out of Russia, out of China, and Iran do not affect only those populations and the populations around them.

They are also, as I discovered in my travels, absolutely endemic, shockingly endemic, both in Africa and in South and Latin America, and we need to draw on our global capabilities and enhance our global capabilities to push back at this disinformation by flooding the zone with accurate information and I look forward to helping USAGM do that.

Senator BARRASSO. Mr. Chairman, you may have seen this yesterday.

Ms. Bennett, yesterday the State Department spokesperson Ned Price stated this. He said, "The Kremlin is engaged in a full assault on media freedom, access to information, and the truth."

He went on to say the Russian Government fundamentally and willfully disregards what it means to have a free press as evidenced by them blocking or banning nearly every independent Russian outlet seeking to report from inside the country.

Putin is taking over complete control of news and information through censorship, attacks on the press. Russia is labeling media outlets as extremist. You may have seen that. Reading and sharing this—their content on social networks subjects individuals to criminal prosecution.

Russia passed a law imposing 15 years in jail for sharing information that goes against Putin's narrative on Ukraine, basically, against the truth, and Western media is attempting to push back on the disinformation and efforts by leaders such as he to control the news.

How has Russia's actions against the press and journalists impacted what you will be asked to do it at U.S. Agency for Global Media?

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you, Senator.

It impacts in a couple of different ways. One, as you mentioned, the crackdown on the ability of ordinary citizens to receive information and for journalists inside the country to report information makes it increasingly important that our efforts to make sure that we keep ahead of the circumvention tools that we have at our disposal right now and advance them so that we can increasingly get into these closed societies.

We have lots of evidence in Russia, in China, and Iran that the people there, when given the opportunity, will seek out this information and we need to make it available to them.

And I would also underscore for you that the issues—the very dreadful issues that you have just talked about, about the security

and safety issues going on affecting journalists there, I think, does help underscore the role that the passion and mission of journalists play in continuing to do this valuable work.

Senator BARRASSO. That leads into my final question, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for allowing me to go over my time.

What steps can the agency take to get accurate information and news to the Russian people about what their government's actions really are in Ukraine?

Ms. BENNETT. Senator, there are many different ways we can do that. Some of them are technological and some of them are social. But we can see right now that Voice of America and Radio Free Europe are right now getting record traffic from both inside and the Russian periphery. People who are offered the opportunity to get this information seek it out.

We need to make their tools that help them seek it out more available to them, safer, and we also need to get ahead of the technology so that as the Russians and the other authoritarian regimes seek to shut down these countries that we are equally capable in bypassing those barriers.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you for your helpful answers. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Kaine. Absolutely. Thanks, Senator Barrasso.

By WebEx we have Senator Van Hollen now joining us.

[No response.]

Senator Kaine. I will turn to Senator Portman, who, I believe, is also here via WebEx.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you very much, Chairman Kaine and to Ranking Member Barrasso.

Thank you all for having this hearing and, Ms. Bennett, I appreciate your willingness to step up and serve our country again after your service at the Voice of America, and welcome to your family, including your husband, Don Graham, who I see back behind you somewhere lurking.

I want to talk a little about my concern about what has happened to the U.S. Agency for Global Media. Without having leadership in place it has been kind of adrift. It is my sense that the staff has had some morale challenges and that stable leadership is really needed right now.

I think you probably know better than most, having been director of the Voice of America, the importance of USAGM's reliability and consistency in terms of the foreign audience that trusts them and that, therefore, sets them apart from other news sources.

My question to you is, if confirmed, it would be up to you to reestablish that trust and, by the way, with Congress and the American people as well, but certainly the foreign audiences.

What are your plans and how would you empower the networks to protect freedom and democracy in countries that are increasingly, as we have heard today, under threat from Russia, from China, from other authoritarian regimes?

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you, Senator, and I am glad you used the word trust because one of the hallmarks of my leadership throughout my career has been the fact that I want to cultivate trust with everyone that our news organization touches.

With the staff, with its stakeholders, with its audiences, trust is one of the most important things. Without it, you cannot do anything, going forward.

So going in and reestablishing the trust inside USAGM, I hope, will go a long way towards helping improve the morale there because I saw that even under the most difficult circumstances, even when the morale was the lowest, no one ever, ever, ever abandoned their faith in the mission or their passion for the mission.

And so helping people get the tools and the processes and the support that they need to do that mission, I think, will go a long way towards restoring trust and restoring a morale that is essential to operating effectively.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you, Ms. Bennett.

I think you will have your hands full and, again, with your background I think you will come in with some credibility with the other journalists there, and I hope that we can at this critical time have a very effective message countering the disinformation and propaganda that is increasing out there in every format, particularly online.

I want to ask you a specific question, if I could, with regard to North Korea. Along with Senator Brown and Senator Coons and others, I wrote and introduced what is called the Otto Warmbier Countering North Korea Censorship and Surveillance Act.

It passed this committee, actually, in October and we are hoping to get a vote on the floor soon. It seeks to combat the North Korea regime's repressive information environment, which is flooded entirely with regime-sponsored propaganda, as you know, and it actually censors outside news.

What is your understanding of Radio Free Asia's and Voice of America's programming to the North Korean audiences?

Ms. BENNETT. Senator, thank you very much, and my understanding, based on my time there, is that there is substantial programming that helps the people in North Korea see and understand what is happening in a truthful way that they cannot access any other way and also gives them a look at what life is like in other parts of the world that—an insight that they are, largely, forbidden to have.

And I think I would like to say that even right now there is a surprising audience inside North Korea for truthful news and information. I have been lucky enough to read some reports that really surprised even me about the extent to which Voice of America and Radio Free Asia's content is available.

And I wonder if I might be permitted—I carried—I was so struck by this that I carry this statement with me. I had it laminated. I put it in my purse, carried it with me and read it to anyone who would listen.

It is about North Korea, and it is a statement that says, "My name is Thae Yong-ho. I am the former deputy ambassador of North Korea to the United Kingdom, and today I would like to say that the Voice of America has been playing a very important role to bring back the human rights to every citizen of the world and, so far, VOA has played a very important role to push the world to a better world."

And when I was in North Korea as a diplomat in the foreign ministry, I read every morning and afternoon the materials. We called them radio reference materials of VOA, and the North Korean regime also pays great attention to the context of VOA.

I think it is very important that VOA should strengthen its activity and also its contents so that one day, I hope, VOA is remembered by the North Korean people as kind of the main player who contributed a lot for the reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

Now, he was speaking on VOA broadcasts. Therefore, the emphasis on VOA. But Radio Free Asia also has the same kind of impact inside North Korea and I think it is one that we can build on and accentuate, going forward.

Senator PORTMAN. Great. Thank you very much.

We also understand that there is some damage to some of the antennas that have been used in the past to be able to broadcast into North Korea and there is a need to repair those antennas.

Should you be confirmed, I would love to work with you on that, and also the Open Technology Fund has some tools to be able to circumvent some of the censorship and I want to be sure that you are working with them as well, who could benefit from our legislation.

Do you have any exposure to that group—to the Open Technology Fund?

Ms. BENNETT. Yes, Senator, I do.

I have met with and talked to the people on the Open Technology Fund. I have nothing but respect and admiration and, frankly, great excitement about the possibility of going there, working with them and helping develop those essential tools.

Yes, Senator, and I will welcome discussions and support from anyone in helping achieve that mission.

Senator PORTMAN. Great. What is your assessment of RFE and Radio Liberty's coverage of the war in Ukraine?

Ms. BENNETT. Senator, I think that the entire U.S. Agency for Global Media are doing just an extraordinary job of covering that conflict and providing useful information to the people there and also to the people around the world.

As we mentioned earlier, it is very, very important to make sure the rest of the world also knows this, and I think that there is so much more that can be done to build on the work that is being done right now to make sure that more people see it, more people hear it, a bigger audience around the world gets that news and information.

I really look forward to working to build on the wonderful work that is being done currently and make it even more available.

Senator PORTMAN. Do you think that Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty should recommence its physical operations in Russia? Has that been an issue in terms of, as Senator Barrasso asked, allowing the Russian people to get the facts as to what is really going on in Ukraine?

Ms. BENNETT. Senator, I apologize, but I am not very familiar with that particular issue right at the moment. But I look forward to looking into it and getting back to you if you would like.

Senator PORTMAN. That would be great. I think broadcasting news to our Russian audience is really important right now and

that is something to think about is whether we should try to recommence our physical operations there.

Thank you very much for your testimony today and, again, your willingness to step up and be involved in another leadership role, helping to spread truth and, frankly, allowing people around the world to know what America is really up to, which is we are involved in liberating people and helping people and, in Ukraine, trying to avoid atrocities from occurring from Russia, thanks to an unjustified, illegal, unwarranted invasion of that country.

And so my hope is that you will be able to help to communicate that message and that is such a critical message right now, particularly, again, with all the disinformation and propaganda out there, particularly on social media.

So thank you, and best of luck.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Senator Portman.

I let you exceed your time because I was told that Senator Schatz was on his way and he is here.

And so, Senator Schatz, you are next.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Ms. Bennett, for being willing to serve again.

I want to start with internet freedom. What lessons did you learn at VOA about the importance of open and reliable internet access in authoritarian countries in particular?

Ms. BENNETT. Senator Schatz, that is a—thank you for that question because that is a very, very important question, and making sure that we stay technologically not just catching up but advanced in providing internet access to people around the world is really critical to making sure that the best work that is being done there gets made available to people around the world because that is increasingly the way people are obtaining their information and is very important, and as authoritarian regimes get better at locking down and closing down those systems we need to get better at breaking them down.

Senator SCHATZ. Tell me about the Open Technology Fund. You do not have to summarize it for me at the more basic level, but how do you think OTF can fill some of these new gaps and, like you say, stay a little bit ahead of the curve of the authoritarians?

Ms. BENNETT. Senator, I am looking forward to diving into that issue and making sure that the good work and research that is being done there we can draw on that to move forward.

One of the most important things that the Open Technology Fund does right now is support and develop and distribute circumvention tools that enable people—audiences—safely to access the content provided by USAGM around the world even when it is denied to them through their own countries' mechanisms.

Senator SCHATZ. And I assume there is an opportunity for private sector partnership here, as some of these circumvention—most of these circumvention tools, I would venture to guess, are developed outside of the four corners of the government.

Ms. BENNETT. It is one of the strengths, I think, of the Open Technology Fund is its ability to see and use those partnerships, and I look forward to expanding them as much as possible.

Senator SCHATZ. I do not want to get you in trouble here. But I am going to say that USAGM was politicized in a way that was deeply unfortunate and has to be reversed, and so I would just like for you to talk through how we are going to maintain the reputation of USAGM and restore the sense among people on both sides of the aisle and across the planet that you are not doing anybody's bidding other than the bidding of fair and accurate information and the dissemination of facts across the planet.

Can you speak to that for me?

Ms. BENNETT. Yes, Senator. Thank you for that question because I think that my nearly 50-year career in journalism I have striven to make sure that I always uphold the principles of neutrality, non-partisanship, unbiased reporting in journalism and I intend to keep on fulfilling those principles and those are the principles that USAGM wants at its very heart and soul to maintain.

There is no room for partisanship inside the Voice of America. It is a nonpartisan unbiased operation without the ability to act independently and to present news of all kinds. It is of not the greatest use it could possibly be. There is no room for partisanship, Senator.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you. This question may be a little more challenging, not in a political sense but I am sort of puzzling through this as I think about the Voice of America and Radio Free Asia.

You are producing content and you are putting it on the airwaves. I am not one of these people who thinks that every time there is a new medium for communication the other ones become irrelevant. Radio is still a very powerful tool and we ought to fund it and we—and what they are doing is essential.

And, yet, people are getting their information in lots of new ways. How do you kind of envision—other than or in addition to OTF and kind of the convening authority that you have and the ability that you have to distribute dissemination tools, what does VOA look like in 50 years? Is it still radio? What does the future look like?

Ms. BENNETT. Senator, I wish I could see ahead 50 years. But what I can say is that I am a very pragmatic leader. What I care about is what works.

If people are receiving their news and information on their cell phones then we should provide news and information on their cell phones. If they are providing—if they are accessing news and information through shortwave radio we should be providing information and news to them via shortwave radio.

We need to use the tools that work and it needs to be a fact-based decision on how we deploy our resources to do that and I think it is a very exciting opportunity to be able to continue to focus our resources where they can be most effectively used.

Senator SCHATZ. Just one final question, though.

Is there someone doing analysis of sort of the mix of mediums, right? When you do any kind of communications campaign you say, well, there is going to be 10 percent for print and 20 percent for web and 10 percent for radio and the rest for television.

Are you thinking through what the mix is? Because the government funding lines do not necessarily—they are not so anticipatory and they are probably not so flexible. I am just wondering if at

least we can be in a dialogue about what that mix is over what period of time.

And you do not necessarily—you are not in charge of precipitating the transformation but you, I think, are in charge of writing it, understanding it, and remaining effective in a changing landscape.

Ms. BENNETT. Yes, Senator. I think there is—I think that is a very exciting challenge and I think it is one that we can continue to do most not only effectively but more effectively, and it is a very interesting challenge because that mix is different in different parts of the world and in different countries.

And so doing deep analyses of who the audience is, what they need, what they are looking for, is really critical to making those decisions. The more information we have like that and the more attention we pay to it, the better decisions we are going to make on that subject in the future.

Senator SCHATZ. Sure. As a perfect example, shortwave radio is not something that comes top of mind in the United States and is still an enormously powerful tool elsewhere.

Ms. BENNETT. Yes, Senator. May I give you an example?

Because at my time at Voice of America, I am sure you remember the tremendous tragedy inside Myanmar when the Rohingya were chased from their homes and were forced to resettle in Bangladesh.

Shortly after that happened, people were still coming across the river. I went to the refugee camps in Bangladesh to see the Rohingya refugees and discovered that even if they had just been chased from their homes, their hunger for information was just as strong as in any other part of the world, and very quickly, very flexibly, very nimbly, we were able to set up a Rohingya language broadcast using shortwave into those camps and we created—back at Voice of America created a model that is replicable into other refugee camps around the world.

So yes, I agree with you, Senator.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Chairman.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Senator Schatz.

Ms. Bennett, one last question for me and then I will see if others here have questions. Senator Barrasso is introducing a witness at another committee hearing and will return.

The question I want to ask is I sometimes worry about the silo effect of federal government or any institution that everybody has got their little piece, and instead of looking comprehensively we sort of get into our silos.

USAGM is an important element of global—sort of global engagement, public diplomacy, but there is other agencies, institutions, and bureaus within the U.S. government that are also in that public diplomacy space.

Talk a little bit about how you see USAGM kind of in that array of other actors and what are the appropriate relationships to build and nurture among the network without compromising the journalistic objectivity that USAGM needs to maintain.

Ms. BENNETT. Absolutely, Senator. Thank you for asking that question.

And I hate silos. I hate silos. They are—they impede people doing their best work. And so I think that there are many, many tools in the information space that USAGM occupies, and making sure that USAGM is a willing and open and transparent and trustworthy partner to help look at the different ways that people are accessing information and the different lanes that people fulfill in doing that mission, I think, is incredibly important and I really commit to making sure that we avoid silos of all kinds in our work.

Senator Kaine. Senator Menendez is on the way here so I am going to keep asking questions until he arrives.

Let me ask you this. In your VOA experience, did you kind of—did you have the feeling as you looked at what other nations were doing, wow, we are out resourced, or we are getting the right amount of resources?

I am assuming you did not feel like you were getting too many. So what has been your sense in the recent iteration of USAGM and Voice of America about the degree of resources that the U.S. is committing to this—these important goals vis-a-vis other nations?

Ms. Bennett. Senator, we appreciate the financial support that the Senate gives to us at any amount and, yet, I can say that looking out over the globe we are vastly out resourced by our competitors and our adversaries.

Whatever the funding level we get, Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Asia, Office of Cuba Broadcasting, and the Office of Middle East Broadcasting will all continue to do our best.

However, we are facing an extremely well resourced, professional, and very impressive infrastructure around the world, and whatever resources we can be given in the future will be put to good use.

Senator Kaine. And those adversaries are, principally, Russia and China but not exclusively. I think Iran has Spanish language broadcasting capacity.

Are there other nations than those that I have mentioned that are really active in this area that we need to pay attention to as we make our own resource decisions?

Ms. Bennett. Those three nations are the primary sources of that kind of competition. The thing that I think people find surprising is that this kind of—these three adversaries are operating not just in their own countries and their neighboring countries but all over the world, and so it is equally important to be aware of the incredible inroads they are making in Africa and Latin and South America, as well as the rest of the globe.

Senator Kaine. Ms. Bennett, thank you.

I will now turn to Senator Menendez for his questions.

The Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Bennett, congratulations on your nomination. I am sorry that other obligations kept me away from hearing the totality of your testimony so you will excuse me if something I ask you may have been asked already.

When a foreign country like China goes ahead and puts a couple of million Uyghurs in concentration camps—and we know that to be true—when Cuba goes ahead and represses its citizens for peacefully protesting and recently passed a law that actually makes for what we would consider free speech rights a punishment

by death—and we know that to be true—it is publicly reported—what is the—what is our obligation?

I use those by ways of example. It can be—I can go to Africa. I can go to a whole bunch of places. What is our obligation, from your perspective, with the U.S. Agency for Global Media to do as it relates to reporting about those instances and those challenges in the world?

Ms. BENNETT. Senator, thank you very much. That is—that kind of obligation is at the heart of the mission of USAGM because reporting truthfully and factually the kind of information that the repressive regimes such as the ones you named are trying to keep from the world and from their own people is really a key component of what USAGM does.

And I also think that reporting on repressive regimes and human rights such as the ones that you just mentioned are felt by journalists in their very soul. It is what they want to do. They want to make sure that these unseen and unheard people are able to bring their stories to the world and that information is a powerful tool.

The Chairman: And, especially, I would assume, that since that information, especially in closed societies where the state is the only actor in terms of providing information to its people to the extent that others can get in from—people within those countries can get information by circumvention tools or by the internet to the access—to the extent that they have access to the internet or in other forums, it seems to me that it is one of the critically important elements of what we do in surrogate broadcasting in the world is to give a window of information to closed societies and people who do not otherwise have—because of the nature of their repressive regimes do not have that open window.

So is that a fair statement of your view of policy?

Ms. BENNETT. Senator, it is an absolutely fair statement.

The CHAIRMAN. Because there have been suggestions in the past that your previous roles suggests that that is not the view that you had, that in fact that you were, “advocates” for some of the views of these regimes, and I just wanted to set the record straight since not too many may attend the hearing but when it comes time for a business meeting we will hear a chorus of things from some people.

Ms. BENNETT. Senator, I appreciate that, and my entire journalistic career has been devoted to giving truthful news and information and not advocating for any position whatsoever, especially not that of a repressive regime.

The CHAIRMAN. And one last thing. As you are probably aware, Congress has legislated a series of reforms to the board, as we would refer to it, following the dissolution of the Broadcasters Board of Governors model.

In all these changes, Congress has made clear that an advisory board comprised of experienced professionals who are not otherwise employed by the U.S. government is critical to protecting the firewall that we have sought to establish.

If confirmed, do you agree and how would you expect to utilize that advisory board?

Ms. BENNETT. Senator, I agree that boards can and should be an important partner in making the kinds of decisions that you need

to make inside an agency like this, and I will commit to working collaboratively, openly, truthfully, and on a nonpartisan basis with such an advisory board.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Senator KAINE. Ms. Bennett, I thank you for your testimony. Again, congratulations on your nomination.

I am going to ask that the committee record on this hearing be open until 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, the 9th of June.

If any colleagues either who have been here or who were not unable to attend submit questions before that time, I would encourage you to answer them fully and promptly.

And with that, the committee hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:53 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO AMANDA BENNETT BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Grantees vs. Broadcasters

Question. You have experience running Voice of America, which has a unique mission among the various surrogates under USAGM's mandate.

- How will you work to ensure that each of the surrogates can fulfill its unique mandate?

Answer. If I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, I would work to ensure that everything USAGM does supports its mission as a stable, coordinated, efficient, and transparent organization serving its surrogates and to create conditions in which truthful journalism can be most effectively practiced. I would work to ensure coordination and cooperation among networks to make the most efficient use of all the agency's assets. And I would reaffirm both the mission and the editorial independence that underpins the worldwide credibility that USAGM surrogates all enjoy.

Imbalance of Resources

Question. Despite Congressional efforts to boost resources across the U.S. Government to counter misinformation, , malign actors like Russia and China continue to invest significant amounts in their disinformation and propaganda efforts.

- What specific efforts through the broadcasters and grantees do you believe are the most valuable in countering misinformation?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to accelerate across all USAGM broadcasters and grantees advances in technology and effective implementation, including circumvention tools and other emerging means, to ensure that information can be seen and heard by the people who need it the most, especially those in closed societies where people do not otherwise have access. This requires USAGM to become even more sophisticated in its efforts to break down information-blocking barriers from repressive authoritarian regimes, like Russia and China, and to be maximally and strategically prepared to flood the zone with fact-based, truthful reporting to the largest global audiences and in as many easily accessible means as possible.

Question. What role do you see for USAGM in growing audiences for fact-checking and combatting disinformation?

Answer. If confirmed, I would welcome the opportunity to work within USAGM and its entities and with interagency partners, Congress and stakeholders on this matter.

Question. Do you commit to engage constructively with representatives of organized labor on behalf of any employees of USAGM or its affiliates?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed.

Question. Do you commit to convene promotion boards for any eligible Foreign Service Officers at USAGM or its affiliates?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed.

Question. During your time as head of VOA, did you convene promotion boards for eligible Foreign Service Officers at VOA?

Answer. To my knowledge, boards for eligible Foreign Service Offices were convened during my tenure.

Question. What is your view on the role of Foreign Service Officers as journalists for USAGM or its affiliates?

Answer. I respect the role of Foreign Service Officers as journalists for USAGM and its affiliates in support of its mission, and if confirmed, I pledge to carefully balance various agency equities, including best use of resources and avoiding duplication.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO AMANDA BENNETT BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Management and Operations

Question. What is your understanding of morale throughout the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM)?

Answer. While I am not at USAGM and cannot speak with certainty, I can appreciate that the past few years have likely been stressful for the agency and staff due in large part to the global pandemic and its impacts, as well as the fact that there have been four different heads of agency over the past three years. Furthermore, threats to freedom of the press and journalist safety are at an all-time high. This prolonged strain, uncertainty, and insecurity has no doubt taken its toll on morale overall. That said, I have deep respect and admiration for this agency's workforce and experienced first-hand their hunger and passion for the mission despite possible morale shortcomings.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at USAGM?

Answer. If confirmed, I would take morale very seriously and devote attention to achieving significant positive impacts, like what we were able to accomplish during my tenure at VOA as shown by annual improvements to its FEVS ratings during my tenure. If confirmed, the first thing I would do is make sure agency staff understand that I share their hunger and passion for the mission, that I understand what they're doing, and that I would do my best to help them achieve success. The second thing I would do is to make sure that the conditions at USAGM support them in their mission and that everything at USAGM will be used to advance the incredibly important work that they do.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at USAGM?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work to ensure that everything that USAGM does supports its mission as a stable, coordinated, efficient, and transparent organization serving its broadcasters and creating conditions in which truthful journalism can be most effectively practiced.

Question. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. Over my nearly 50-years long career, I have done my best to lead by example, to set expectations regarding the highest journalistic standards, and to communicate clearly about those expectations. If confirmed, this is the approach I would continue to take as CEO. I am a pragmatic leader. I want to do what works best. I make decisions based on facts and with input from relevant stakeholders. I have a history of producing and leading the production of fact-based, nonpartisan news coverage.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. To the extent a leader must deliver constructive feedback to subordinates, my strong preference, if confirmed, would always be to do so in a respectful manner and in private.

Question. Was bullying tolerated at VOA during your tenure?

Answer. No, bullying was not and should not be tolerated, and if confirmed, I would not tolerate bullying or any other form of harassment.

Question. What is the appropriate leadership response upon learning that a supervisor is bullying employees?

Answer. The appropriate leadership response, and one I would adhere to if confirmed, would be to alert agency officials and to follow all required policies and procedures.

Question. Is it appropriate to mislead or lie about one's background on a resume? If not, what is the appropriate remedy to such a situation?

Answer. No, it is never appropriate to be intentionally deceptive on a resume, including to mislead or lie. The appropriate remedy, and one I would adhere to if confirmed, would be to alert agency officials and to follow all required policies and procedures.

Question. In your opinion, when is it appropriate for a federal employee of USAGM or a USAGM affiliate to participate in the activities of another U.S. government entity or initiative? When is it not appropriate?

Answer. To my knowledge, there are rules and regulations regarding federal employee participation in the activities of another U.S. government entity or initiative which, if confirmed, I commit to continuing to follow.

Question. When leading an organization, is it appropriate to hire personal acquaintances to senior positions? In what instances would it be appropriate?

Answer. If confirmed, I would look forward to bringing a deep and broad knowledge of industry and government wide expertise to my role as CEO to attract the best talent while as I have done in the past, committing to continuing to follow all required policies and procedures related to attracting, recruiting, and retaining top talent in service to our country.

Question. Are you aware of flaws in USAGM's security processes that were identified by the Office of Personal Management as well as the Office of the Director of National Intelligence? If yes, what do you intend to do to address those flaws, if confirmed?

Answer. Yes, I am aware that there are security processes USAGM has been working to improve, and if confirmed, I commit to immediately focusing on all aspects of USAGM's security processes, as well as agency actions taken or underway.

Question. Are USAGM networks and grantees higher priority targets than other news organizations due to its connections to the U.S. government?

Answer. Yes, the safety and security of journalists (and in some cases also their families) is at higher risk because of the agency's commitment to providing factual news and information to people under authoritarian regimes who have no other access to do this. The safety and security of journalists is of utmost priority as risks to reliable, fact-based reporting increase at historic rates.

Question. Is it important for USAGM to do its best to ensure that the employees of networks and grantees are not in any way influenced by foreign governments?

Answer. Absolutely.

Grantees

Question. Should USAGM have control over not just funding for the grantees—Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, Middle East Broadcasting Networks, and the Open Technology Fund—but also operational or editorial control? Should they have more autonomy?

Answer. If confirmed, I would abide by all statutory authorities and provisions provided by Congress to the CEO of USAGM and would welcome engagement with Congress on these topics or any proposed changes.

Question. Should USAGM control the make-up of the grantee boards?

Answer. If confirmed, I would abide by all statutory authorities and provisions provided by Congress to the CEO of USAGM and would welcome engagement with Congress on these topics or any proposed changes.

Voice of America (VOA)

Question. What is VOA's mission and would you change it in any way, if confirmed?

Answer. Enacted in 1976, Congress enumerated in Public Law 94-350 (also known as the VOA Charter) three principles to define the organization's mission (PL 94-350), and if confirmed, I commit to following Congress' mandate and would welcome engagement with Congress on any proposed changes.

Question. Is one of VOA's primary responsibilities covering U.S. news, including actions and statements by the U.S. government?

Answer. Yes, according to Congress, two of PL 94-350's (also known as the VOA Charter) guiding principles expressly state that VOA will cover America, and if confirmed, I commit to following Congress' mandate.

Question. How is VOA different from CNN/CNN International? From BBC and its language services?

Answer. CNN/CNN International is different from VOA in many ways. CNN/CNN International is a for-profit, commercial-driven model; while its broadcasts are occasionally available in locations such as international airports and hotels frequented by international business travelers, they have almost no audience in USAGM markets outside such high-end venues. CNN/CNN International provide news and information geared mainly to U.S. and international travelers. Unlike USAGM networks, CNN/CNN International provide almost no coverage of international or local news geared toward audiences with no other access to fact-based information, nor are they required to share news and information about the U.S., its people and policies to the world. Unlike USAGM networks, which provide news and information in (62) local languages, CNN/CNN International provides news and information in seven languages, including such languages as English, German, and Japanese, aimed at economically developed and largely free markets. While CNN/ CNN International is typically available to audiences via costly satellite subscription and high-bandwidth services, USAGM's networks are distributed free via satellite, social media, our websites, OTT applications, FM radio, medium wave radio, shortwave radio, always catered to the viewing and listening preferences of its target audiences in each market. While the BBC operates in 22 fewer languages than does USAGM, its journalism is similar to VOA and USAGM's other networks in that it does a good job in hard-to-reach places and is able to reach audiences inside authoritarian regimes where there is no other access for truthful, fact-based information. USAGM works closely with the BBC to ensure that, in markets where both are operating, efforts are co-productive and not redundant.

Question. Who are VOA's most important audiences?

Answer. VOA's most important audiences are those inside authoritarian regimes where there is no other access for truthful, fact-based information.

Question. Should VOA journalists be forward deployed to report on non-U.S. news?

Answer. As circumstances warrant, there may be value in support of USAGM mission for this to happen, and if confirmed, I would require collaboration and coordination across entities to ensure best use of resources and to avoid duplication.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO AMANDA BENNETT BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. Earlier this year, USAGM notified Congress of its intent to explore a reduction in force (RIF) for the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB). Following through on this action would mean letting go of dozens of OCB staff. This RIF seems like a counterintuitive plan given that Cuba experienced historic protests on July 11, 2021. These protests demonstrated the demand for uncensored information is higher than ever on the island.

- Do you agree with the decision to reduce the size of OCB in light of recent events in Cuba?

Answer. While I am not privy to USAGM's current internal budget considerations, I am aware that OCB's appropriation has taken a significant cut and one that would present notable challenges for any organization. I commit that, if confirmed, I will review this issue closely and work to ensure that OCB creates the greatest impact for every dollar Congress provides the network and seek additional funding wherever possible to assist OCB in fulfilling its mission.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to supporting an increase to OCB's budget and role in countering the Castro/Diaz-Canel regime?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Are you supportive of the efforts to relocate OCB from Miami to Washington, D.C., even though most of the Cuban American community supports it remaining in Miami?

Answer. Though I do not have a full sense of what USAGM may have under consideration regarding changes to its footprint in Florida or elsewhere, I recognize that OCB has a strong historic connection to the Cuban American community in Miami, and if confirmed, I would be very mindful of the importance of those connections.

Question. USAGM must do more to counter and balance the narratives amplified by China and Russian state media, which are increasingly sophisticated in their international offerings. In some cases, Russia Today (RT) and Chinese Global Television Network (CGTN) affiliates are among the most popular news sources in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. In short, Russia and China are starting to win the war for hearts and minds in the countries we need to support the U.S.

- If confirmed, how will you enhance USAGM's efforts to provide media offerings that can compete with RT and CGTN, as well as other versions of our adversaries' state-run media?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to doing all I can to enhance USAGM's efforts to provide media offerings that can compete with Russia Today (RT) and Chinese Global Television Network (CGTN) to audiences who need it the most. USAGM also must become more sophisticated and strategic than its adversaries and be maximally prepared to flood the zone with fact-based, truthful reporting to the largest global audiences—including in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia—and in as many more easily accessible means as possible.

Question. While you led Voice of America, you faced criticism from Chinese and Cuban diaspora communities who accused VOA of glorifying communist leaders like Fidel Castro and Che Guevara and for repeating Chinese Communist Party (CCP) talking points without offering other views. In particular, an April 7, 2020 article documents the end of the lockdown in Wuhan without clarifying that the CCP implemented the lockdown with brutal severity—and in some cases, welding people shut into their apartments.

- Why did VOA articles, including the April 7 article, consistently not provide additional information countering Chinese Government statements about the lockdown?

Answer. If confirmed, I pledge to continue my 50-year commitment to unbiased, fact-based, truthful, believable reporting and protecting news and information from the increasingly rigorous attempts to block it.

Question. Is it appropriate for VOA to implicitly endorse the policies of our top strategic competitor?

Answer. No.

Question. In April 2017, USAGM broadcasted an interview with Guo Wengui, a well-known critic of General Secretary Xi Jinping. Mid-interview, the broadcast was cut off. According to some critics, this was at the behest of the People's Republic of China embassy in D.C.

- Can you confirm if VOA personnel, under your watch, cut off the interview due to pressure from the Chinese embassy? If not, why was the interview abruptly ended?

Answer. Respectfully, the interview was not cut off due to pressure from the Chinese embassy. VOA leadership ended the interview when it was clear that required journalistic ethics and professional standards were not being followed.

Question. Did the agency acknowledge, in a timely way, that the CCP raised objections to the interview?

Answer. I am not entirely clear what this question is asking, but my experience was that in all appropriate venues, including in discussions with Congress, the agency acknowledged the objections raised by the CCP and the fact that these objections did not influence content. The agency routinely received objections related to its programming (from CCP, as well as other governments and stakeholders), and did not bow to pressure or influence from foreign governments in its decision-making or in its production of full, fair, and balanced journalism in the face of even the most extreme pressures.

Question. Were agency employees disciplined in this matter, and if so, to what extent?

Answer. Yes, agency employees were disciplined in this matter, but respectfully, my understanding is that privacy rules may prevent me from discussing details in employee personnel files.

Question. There are reports that a new China Branch director ordered employees to “balance” the “anti-China” tone with more “pro-China” voices in their reports.

- Given the Chinese record of human rights violations and its significant anti-US propaganda effort, what is your view of this?

Answer. To be clear, there is absolutely no place for biased coverage in favor of China or any other regime. Over my nearly 50-year career in journalism, I have striven to make sure that I always uphold the principles of unbiased reporting in journalism, neutrality, and nonpartisanship. During my tenure at VOA, I took every allegation of bias coverage seriously and scrupulously looked into them. I also have a strong track record as an open, accessible, and transparent leader who routinely engaged with Congress and stakeholders. If confirmed, I commit to continuing this approach on behalf of USAGM.

Question. Reports indicate that USAGM/VOA has experienced a loss of 55 million people of VOA’s audience in China. This information emerged in a program review meeting that included the entire China branch, in which VOA’s program review office informed staff of the audience survey. By some calculations, that translated to an 85-90 percent audience loss for VOA’s Mandarin Service.

- Can you confirm that VOA’s Mandarin service experienced this loss in viewership in China?

Answer. Respectfully, I am unfamiliar with these reports and cannot confirm; rather, I recall an increase in the Chinese audience thanks in part to online access.

Question. What are the reasons for this loss in viewership?

Answer. Again, I am not aware of this loss in Chinese viewership and question whether something may have been misunderstood about the information presented at the time.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to reverse this loss?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to ensuring that information can be seen and heard by the people who need it the most.

Question. What is your response to other claims that VOA has not sufficiently covered human rights abuses in Cuba, Iran, and China?

Answer. At the heart of the mission of USAGM is the responsibility to report truthfully and factually the kind of information and human rights abuses that the repressive regimes are trying to keep from the world and from their own people. Making sure that these unseen and unheard people can bring their stories to the world is a key component of what USAGM does, and if confirmed, one I intend to uphold.

Question. In light of these claims, how can the committee be confident of your ability to lead USAGM to counter Chinese and Russian propaganda, if you are confirmed?

Answer. If confirmed, I would intend to lead by empowering USAGM and its entities to model the values of a free press that we hold as Americans in a democratic society. This is an extremely powerful message to send to authoritarian regimes intent on undermining credible, fact-based, and unbiased coverage around the globe. If confirmed, I look forward to helping USAGM draw upon and enhance our global capabilities to push back at Chinese and Russian propaganda, to amplify its capacity and to flood the zone with accurate information.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO AMANDA BENNETT BY SENATOR TED CRUZ

VOA/China

Question. In May 2017, Sasha Gong—then the Voice of America’s Mandarin Service Chief—suggested that VOA’s top management caved to pressure from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to censor a broadcast built around allegations made by CCP critic Guo Wengui. Specifically, Ms. Gong wrote in the Wall Street Journal that “On April 13, six days in advance, VOA began promoting the interview to audiences on all of its platforms. On April 17 the Chinese Government issued an arrest warrant for Mr. Guo without making public any details of his alleged crimes. That

same day, the Chinese Foreign Ministry summoned VOA's Beijing correspondent and complained that the interview constituted interference in China's internal affairs. Specifically, the Chinese said the interview would disturb the 19th Communist Party Congress, which is scheduled to be held later this year. The Chinese threatened to 'respond seriously' if the interview went forward. A few hours later, the VOA's top management in Washington asked me to cancel the live interview." The interview was ultimately aired in a limited version. Ms. Gong was subsequently fired by VOA management in 2018.

- Were you contacted by any officials of the CCP or the People's Republic of China (PRC) regarding VOA's plans to air the broadcast related to Mr. Guo's allegations? If so, please identify the names and titles of those CCP or PRC officials, and describe their requests. For each case, please be specific whether the officials requested that you in any way change the broadcast related to Mr. Guo's allegations, and if so in what way?

Answer. No, I was not personally contacted by officials of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) or the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Question. Were you contacted by any officials from Chinese news organizations regarding VOA's plans to air the broadcast related to Mr. Guo's allegations? If so, please identify the names and titles of those CCP or PRC officials, and describe their requests. For each case, please be specific whether the officials requested that you in any way change the broadcast related to Mr. Guo's allegations, and if so in what way?

Answer. No, I was not personally contacted by officials from Chinese news organizations.

Question. To your knowledge, were any other VOA officials contacted by any officials of the CCP or the PRC regarding VOA's plans to air the broadcast related to Mr. Guo's allegations? If so, please identify the names and titles of those CCP or PRC officials, and describe their requests. For each case, please be specific whether the officials requested that you in any way change the broadcast related to Mr. Guo's allegations, and if so in what way?

Answer. To my knowledge, VOA officials were contacted by CCP or PRC officials. I recall that the Chinese Foreign Ministry contacted the VOA Beijing Bureau Chief to raise concerns about going forward with the interview and that the VOA Deputy Director took a call demanding that VOA not air the proposed broadcast. I am not aware of names or titles. This is not uncommon when journalists and news organizations receive threats from authoritarian regimes; they often do not identify themselves.

Question. Since the decision to limit Mr. Guo's interview, have you met with either CCP or PRC officials in a personal or professional capacity? If so, did you discuss with those officials, at those subsequent meetings, the circumstances around Mr. Guo's interview and its ultimate airing?

Answer. No, I have not met with either CCP or PRC officials in a personal or professional capacity.

VOA/Iran

Question. The management of VOA's Persian News Network (VOA Persian) before and during your tenure was deeply controversial. In 2020, U.S. special representative for Iran Brian Hook—who according to public reports continues to be targeted for murder by the Iranian regime for his service—wrote that "Iranian viewers say its American taxpayer-funded programming often sounds more like the 'Voice of the mullahs' than the 'Voice of America.'" Hook noted that the outlet's reputation for pro-regime propaganda and bias went back years: "In 2014, a group of congressional representatives from both sides of the aisle called for an investigation into VOA Persian after allegations that it deliberately papered over the regime's brutal human rights record."

VOA Persian has also faced sustained scrutiny, including recent Congressional inquiries sent to the USAGM, regarding the on-again-off-again employment of Setareh Derakhshesh Sieg. During your tenure at VOA, VOA Persian was headed by Ms. Sieg. She was reportedly fired in 2021 for misusing official funds and falsifying her resume. The culture she had established at VOA Persian during your tenure was corrosive, according to government investigations and whistleblower accounts. A 2016 OPM investigation reportedly uncovered a culture in which more than half of employees at VOA Persian believed that arbitrary action, personal favoritism, and coercion for partisan political purposes were tolerated. Last year Ms. Sieg was reinstated.

- What steps did you take during your tenure to counter the broadcast and publication at VOA Persian of materials biased in favor of the Iranian regime?

Answer. To be clear, there is absolutely no place for biased coverage in favor of Iran or any other regime. Over my nearly 50-year career in journalism, I have striven to make sure that I always uphold the principles of unbiased reporting in journalism, neutrality, and nonpartisanship. During my tenure at VOA, I took allegations of biased coverage seriously and scrupulously looked into them. I also have a strong track record as an open, accessible, and transparent leader who routinely engaged with Congress and stakeholders.

Question. If confirmed, what specific steps do you intend to take to counter the broadcast and publication across all of USAGM of materials biased in favor of the Iranian regime?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work to ensure that everything that USAGM does supports its mission as a stable, coordinated, efficient, and transparent organization serving its broadcasters and creating conditions in which truthful journalism can be most effectively practiced.

Question. Do you agree with the characterization made by Special Envoy Hook? If not, why not?

Answer. No, I respectfully do not agree with that characterization. At the heart of the mission of USAGM is the responsibility to report truthfully and factually the kind of information and human rights abuses that the repressive regimes, including Iran, are trying to keep from the world and from their own people. Making sure that these unseen and unheard people can bring their stories to the world is a key component of what USAGM does, and if confirmed, one I intend to uphold.

Question. Were you aware of Ms. Sieg's false credentials when she served during your tenure at VOA? What role did you play in hiring or supervising her?

Answer. During my tenure, I recall being made aware of allegations like these and referring them to the appropriate USAGM officials for handling in accordance with all required agency policies and procedures. I did not play a role in hiring Ms. Sieg; she was already employed by VOA prior to my arrival. I did not directly supervise Ms. Sieg; she was a direct report to the VOA Program Director.

Question. If confirmed, what role do you envision in USAGM or VOA for Ms. Sieg? What steps do you intend to take to insulate USAGM employees from political pressure, including and especially to produce coverage biased in favor of the Iranian regime?

Answer. If confirmed, I would arrive without a predetermined vision regarding any agency staff absent first conducting a review in accordance with that agency's editorial independence to better understand USAGM resources and needs to best serve its mission. Over my nearly 50-year career in journalism, I have strived to make sure that I always uphold the principles of neutrality, nonpartisanship, unbiased reporting in journalism. If confirmed, I intend to keep on fulfilling those principles.

DREAMer advocacy / conflicts of interest

Question. You are a co-founder of TheDream.US, which is a project of the New Venture Fund, a leftwing 501(c)(3). The group describes itself as, "the nation's largest college access and success scholarship program for DREAMers," i.e. those who have lived in the United States illegally since coming to the country as a minor. According to TheDream.US, "supporters of TheDream.US nationally include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Pershing Square Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Bill and Steve Graham and the Omidyar Network."

You have allegedly engaged in these and similar advocacies in your official capacity at VOA. In July 2016 you reportedly sent an internal email urging readers to "check out this week's highlights" which included you highlighting that "VOA Spanish interviewed two undocumented immigrants who are high school valedictorians in Texas. Larissa Martinez of Dallas, who received a full scholarship to Yale University, said that many illegal immigrants like her live in fear. She called Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump's immigration plan one of 'hate and prejudice.'"

- Is it accurate that you sent the email describing then-candidate Donald Trump's immigration plan as one of "hate and prejudice"? If so, to what extent do you consider that to have been a lapse in personal judgment?

Answer. While I am not entirely clear what is being referred to here, I do recall compilation emails consisting of multiple news items chosen by its services were periodically sent to staff and were in no way intended to represent advocacy by me

in my official capacity. To be clear, I served in no advocacy role at VOA, and if confirmed, I would not serve in any advocacy role at USAGM.

Question. If confirmed, what specific steps do you intend to take to insulate the USAGM from your personal political advocacy, including on issues related to immigration?

Answer. Prior to joining VOA in 2016, I resigned from any and all roles and responsibilities as co-founder of TheDream.US. In anticipation of this confirmation process, I also resigned from my positions on all remaining external organizations. If confirmed, I would comply with all aspects of my required ethics agreement with the Office of Government Ethics.

Question. How much funding has TheDream.US received from each of: the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Pershing Square Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Bill and Steve Graham and the Omidyar Network?

Answer. Respectfully, I am responding in my personal capacity as a nominee; as stated above, I resigned from TheDream.US and do not have access to this information.

Question. If confirmed, what specific steps do you intend to take to insulate USAGM from influence related to each of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Pershing Square Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Bill and Steve Graham and the Omidyar Network?

Answer. As stated above, if confirmed, I would comply with all aspects of my required ethics agreement with the Office of Government Ethics.

Question. Please list any other donors to TheDream.US who have contributed in excess of \$1000 and describe the specific steps you intend to take, if confirmed, to insulate USAGM from influence related to those funders.

Answer. Respectfully, I am responding in my personal capacity as a nominee; as stated above, I resigned from TheDream.US and do not have access to this information. Further, if confirmed, I would comply with all aspects of my required ethics agreement with the Office of Government Ethics.

Question. Please list any foreign donors to TheDream.US who have contributed any amount of funding and describe the specific steps you intend to take, if confirmed, to insulate USAGM from influence related to those funders.

Answer. None, to my knowledge. However, I am responding in my personal capacity as a nominee; as stated above, I resigned from TheDream.US and do not have access to this information.

Question. Has TheDream.US received funding for the U.S. Federal Government, and if so how much?

Answer. None, to my knowledge. However, I am responding in my personal capacity as a nominee; as stated above, I resigned from TheDream.US and do not have access to this information.

Spending/Oversight

Question. USAspending.gov, the official source for spending data for the U.S. Government, shows a completed delivery order—PIID 95170018F1222—from USAGM to Mobomo, LLC in 2018. The obligated amount was listed as \$10.8 million and the potential award amount was \$16.5 million. According to documentation on Mobomo's site, they developed for VOA a Content Management System (CMS) named "Voltron." The development would have moved VOA away from its long-time reliance on the Pangea CMS platform.

USAGM's FY 2021 "Performance and Accountability Report," however, notes that "In FY 2021, USAGM completed an enterprise audit of content management systems across all of its networks. As a result of this review, the decision was made to bring all networks to a common CMS platform and VOA began transitioning all of its services back to the common Pangea system."

- How much money was spent on the failed transition from Voltron to Pangea, to your knowledge?

Answer. I left VOA in June 2020, and to my knowledge, Voltron had only been partially completed. Respectfully, I would defer to the agency on costs associated with any subsequent transition from Voltron to Pangea.

Question. What was the justification for transitioning to a new CMS?

Answer. When I arrived at VOA, the agency needed significant upgrades across a wide range of technologies. I focused on improvements to a content management system to better equip the agency and its staff to fulfill its mission.

Question. Why and how was Mobomo chosen to be the vendor for developing a new CMS?

Answer. My understanding is that this vendor would have been selected pursuant to an independent procurement process conducted by USAGM's Office of Contracts in accordance with federal acquisition regulations and agency policies on procurement.

Question. In your understanding, why did the transition to a new CMS fail?

Answer. Voltron was still in its early stages of implementation at the time I left VOA. Since I am no longer at VOA, I do not have visibility on why the transition to a new CMS ultimately failed.

Question. If confirmed, what specific steps do you intend to ensure that future digital projects and transitions are not subject to such failures?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek government-wide best practices in contracting, designing, and implementation and understanding of lessons learned related to Voltron.
