

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

July 27, 2018

John F. Lansing  
Chief Executive Officer  
Broadcasting Board of Governors  
330 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20237

Dear CEO Lansing:

I was troubled to read recent reports that Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty purchased ads on Facebook that were targeted at the social media platform's users in the United States.

As you know, federal law restricts the Broadcasting Board of Governors or any of its networks from disseminating material to U.S. audiences except in limited instances. Recognizing a rapidly changing media landscape, the 2012 Smith-Mundt Reform Act allowed the BBG to make content available in the United States upon request and reimbursement. However, the law clearly states that no federal funding for the BBG "shall be used to influence public opinion in the United States."

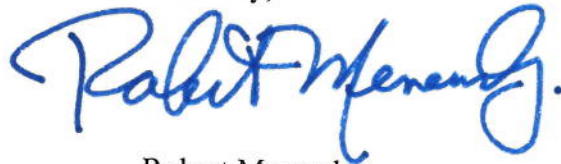
Perhaps now more than ever, the BBG's mission to inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy is of utmost importance. Foreign audiences around the world have come to rely on programming from the BBG's networks because, as described in your agency's FY18 budget justification: "A legally mandated "firewall" prohibits political interference in the agency's content, ensuring that journalists and editors can develop programming that reflects the highest professional standards of journalism."

It is critical that as the United States embraces and promotes freedom, transparency, and democracy, your networks adhere to these standards. While I understand that BBG has made clear that it not BBG's policy or practice to distribute content or target domestic audiences, I look forward to hearing from you how BBG will ensure that it does not do so in the future. To that end, I ask that you respond to the following questions:

1. Did Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty knowingly or intentionally purchase political ads on Facebook to target U.S. users?
2. How many Facebook ads targeting users in the United States did Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty purchase? How many U.S. users were reached through those ads?
3. Have any other BBG networks purchased ads on Facebook or any other social media platform that targeted users in the United States?
4. How is BBG ensuring that BBG and its networks do not distribute content to U.S. users in the future, other than as allowed for by Smith-Mundt Reform Act?

I look forward to your response by August 7, 2018. I also ask that you brief my staff on these issues at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Robert Menendez  
Ranking Member