To authorize United States Government efforts to promote and protect Internet freedom in countries where the freedom of information is under threat.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. MENENDEZ (for himself and Mrs. BLACKBURN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on

A BILL

To authorize United States Government efforts to promote and protect Internet freedom in countries where the freedom of information is under threat.

1 Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-
2 tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,
3 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.
4 This Act may be cited as the “Internet Freedom and
5 Operations (INFO) Act of 2022”.
6 SEC. 2. FINDINGS.
7 Congress finds the following:
(1) More than 3,000,000,000 people use the Internet around the world every day to access information.

(2) Authoritarian and repressive governments routinely use Internet access as a means of suppressing information sharing and communications between people, civil society organizations, and journalists.

SEC. 3. INTERNET FREEDOM.

(a) STATEMENT OF POLICY.—It is the policy of the United States to continue to preserve and expand the Internet as an open, global space for freedom of expression and association.

(b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated for fiscal year 2023—

(1) $75,000,000 to the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development (referred to in this Act as “USAID”) to continue efforts to promote Internet freedom, including through the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor’s Internet Freedom program; and

(2) $49,000,000 to the United States Agency for Global Media (referred to in this Act as “USAGM”) and grantees for Internet freedom and circumvention technologies.
(c) Other Funding Sources.—In addition to the amounts appropriated pursuant to subsection (b), the efforts of the Department of State and USAID to promote Internet freedom may be funded through—

(1) the Economic Support Fund authorized under section 531 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2346);

(2) the Development Assistance Fund authorized under section 653(a) of such Act (22 U.S.C. 2413(a));

(3) amounts appropriated under the heading “Assistance for Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia” in an appropriations Act; and

(4) amounts appropriated for USAGM.

SEC. 4. CIRCUMVENTION TECHNOLOGY.

(a) Defined Term.—In this section, the term “internet censorship circumvention tool” means a software application or other tool that an individual can use to evade foreign government restrictions on Internet access.

(b) Authorization of Funding.—

(1) In General.—If the government of a foreign country restricts or closes off Internet access to the residents of such country, or access to certain websites, the Secretary of State shall make available $2,500,000 from the Economic Support Fund on an
expedited basis to vetted entities already engaged in
Internet freedom programs in such country if the
Secretary determines that such use of funds is in the
national interest.

(2) CRITERIA.—Amounts may be made available under paragraph (1) within 7 days if—

(A) the Secretary of State notifies the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate,
the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate,
the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives, and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives of such planned expenditure; and

(B) such amounts are expended to provide bandwidth for private United States companies that received Federal funding during fiscal year 2021 to provide unrestricted Internet access overseas.

(c) REPORT.—Not later than 60 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State and the Administrator of USAID shall jointly submit a report, which may include a classified annex, to the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate and the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives. Such report shall describe—
(1) as of the date of the report—

(A) the full scope of Internet Freedom programs within the Department of State and USAID, including—

(i) Department of State circumvention efforts; and

(ii) USAID efforts to support Internet infrastructure;

(B) the capacity of Internet censorship circumvention tools supported by the United States Government that are available for use by individuals in foreign countries seeking to counteract censors; and

(C) any barriers to the provision of the efforts described in clauses (i) and (ii) of subparagraph (A), including access to surge funding; and

(2) any new resources needed to provide the United States Government with greater capacity to provide and boost Internet access—

(A) to respond rapidly to Internet shutdowns in closed societies; and

(B) to provide Internet connectivity to foreign locations where the provision of additional
Internet access service would promote freedom from repressive regimes.

(d) REPORT.—Not later than 60 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the USAGM Chief Executive Officer shall submit a report to the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate and the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives that describes—

(1) as of the date of the report—

(A) the full scope of Internet Freedom programs within USAGM, including—

(i) the efforts of the Office of Internet Freedom; and

(ii) the efforts of the Open Technology Fund;

(B) the capacity of Internet censorship circumvention tools supported by the Office of Internet Freedom and grantees of the Open Technology Fund that are available for use by individuals in foreign countries seeking to counteract censors; and

(C) any barriers to the provision of the efforts described in clause (i) and (ii) of subparagraph (A), including access to surge funding; and
(2) successful examples from the Office of Internet Freedom and Open Technology Fund involving—

(A) responding rapidly to Internet shutdowns in closed societies; and

(B) ensuring uninterrupted circumvention services for USAGM entities to promote Internet freedom within repressive regimes.