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## United States Senate

August 29, 2022

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The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave. S.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20528-0525

Dear Secretary Mayorkas,

I remain concerned by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) ongoing efforts to centralize agency authority for countering disinformation. Despite the Homeland Security Advisory Council's (HSAC) preliminary findings on July 18, 2022, that there is "no need" for the Disinformation Governance Board's existence, the Office of Inspector General recently made a recommendation that DHS establish a unified strategy to counter disinformation on social media and operate it through the Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans (PLCY). After the OIG report was made public, HSAC released its final recommendations that notably doesn't recommend a role for PLCY. Therefore, I write to urge you to set aside the OIG's recommendation and not add authority to PLCY's broad mandate.

My growing concern with DHS' efforts to combat "disinformation" stems from its evident politicized nature and attempt to silence certain viewpoints. Immediately upon his confirmation, Under Secretary of PLCY Robert Silvers started the framework for the Disinformation Governance Board, which was made public through whistleblower documents revealing that on September 13, 2021, the Under Secretary lead a memo to you with the subject "Organizing DHS Efforts to Counter Disinformation." The additional documents show a lengthy paper trail of meetings and deliberations that, if implemented, would eventually end in PLCY being the central authority of disinformation for the Department.

While I appreciate your direction to the Homeland Security Advisory Council (HSAC) to review the Disinformation Governance Board, which as I previously mentioned, affirmed that the Board is not needed, it's clear that Under Secretary Silvers still believes this work should continue. It does not come as a shock that he publicly agreed with the OIG's recommendation, pending the public release of the findings from HSAC, to give his office within DHS responsibility to coordinate a unified strategy to counter disinformation on social media over the course of the next year.

In fact, the whistleblower documents give us further insight into his efforts in this space. One specifically distressing revelation from the documents, specifically pertaining to social media was a scheduled meeting organized by the Under Secretary with Twitter executives to "discuss operationalizing public-private partnership" and an "analytical exchange" created by DHS. Regardless of whether the meeting ever happened, the intent of the Under Secretary and his office is extremely telling. It is only logical that DHS remain cautious and skeptical of the OIG's recommendation to task PLCY with anything related to disinformation on social media.

Considering the broad authority of PLCY in tandem with the Under Secretary's publicly-known efforts to centralize the office's authority over "combatting disinformation" Department-wide, it's only a matter of time before PLCY turns this effort into a de facto Disinformation Governance Board. The American people do not need a sub-department to be the sole authority on what is true.

Finally, it's my understanding that much of the delay for getting information to Congress gets stuck within PLCY's bureaucracy after it's gone through clearance from the other Department components. I hardly think it is wise or reasonable to task this office with another job which will inevitably only cause further delays in Congressional responses. Notably, I have still not received answers to questions for the record I submitted from the May 4, 2022 HSGAC hearing where you were questioned and testified on the Disinformation Governance Board and DHS's efforts to "combat disinformation." As such, please provide your responses to the following questions no later than COB, September 9, 2022.

- HSAC's Final Report from the Subcommittee for Disinformation Best Practices and Safeguards did not explicitly outline a role for PLCY in any recommendations. However, the DHS-OIG recommended that PLCY establish a unified strategy to counter disinformation on social media. Undersecretary Silvers concurred with the OIG's recommendation pending HSAC's final report and gave a completion deadline of August 2023. Given the dueling recommendations, what, if any, role are you going to assign to Undersecretary Silvers?
- Please provide a detailed chart on the roles and responsibilities of each DHS office and component in the clearance process.
- Please provide a detailed chart on the roles and responsibilities of Under Secretary Silvers and assistant-secretaries in PLCY and how they conduct the clearance process and coordinate with DHS components.
  - Please ensure the chart reflects Under Secretary Silvers', and his chief of staff's, and any other political appointee's role in clearing information to Congress.
- Please provide the number of requests from Congress that are awaiting clearance in PLCY.
- It's my understanding that DHS assigns items with deadlines. How many Congressional responses have been completed on time? How many have not been completed on time?
- How many Congressional responses have had their deadlines extended during the clearance process, and how many times was each Congressional response extended? Who approves the decision to extend a deadline in the clearance process, and for what reasons may a deadline be extended?

In God We Trust,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Lankford", with a stylized, flowing script.

James Lankford