

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 28, 2007

Mr. Kenneth A. Konz
Inspector General
Corporation for Public Broadcasting
401 Ninth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20004-2129

Dear Mr. Konz:

As you know, a bipartisan group of eight Members of Congress wrote Corporation for Public Broadcasting President Pat Harrison on May 7, 2007 seeking answers to several questions concerning the handling of a taxpayer-funded documentary, "Islam vs. Islamists: Voices from the Muslim Center," by CPB and other elements of the public broadcasting system.

We believe this film addresses an extremely important topic – the struggle within the Muslim community for the soul and future of Islam – in a thoughtful and highly informative way. In our view, it should be seen by the American people who paid for its production on a national, prime-time basis at the earliest possible time. It is our understanding, moreover, that precisely such distribution was envisioned for this film, as for the other "Crossroads" series documentaries, eleven of which have now been broadcast.

Specifically, we asked Ms. Harrison "why this film has not been aired as part of the 'America at a Crossroads' series," despite the fact that a January 30, 2006 CPB press release announced that it "would be included in the initial eight films of the series presented by WETA."

Ms. Harrison responded on May 17, 2007. In her letter, she made several claims that we have reason to question. Of particular concern are representations to the effect that the filmmakers failed to perform their contractual responsibilities when, based on publicly available information, it seems clear that the reasons why this documentary was rejected for broadcast actually lie elsewhere.

In light of the considerable public investment in "Islam vs. Islamists" to date (on the order of \$675,000 expended for its preparation and production) and the compelling public interest in having that investment translated into the widest and earliest possible dissemination, we ask you to conduct an investigation into whether CPB or other public broadcasting agencies that performed work on its behalf or under contract to it in connection with this series (i.e., the Public Broadcasting Service and WETA) acted improperly in one or more of the following respects:

- 1) Was an effort made by one or more of the aforementioned organizations to dictate which filmmakers could participate in the production of “Islam vs. Islamists” on political or other grounds?
- 2) In her letter of May 17th, Ms. Harrison asserted that the filmmakers refused to make certain editorial changes required to ensure that their film met PBS standards. Please clarify to which “standards” she refers and the specific ways in which this documentary in its final, submitted form failed to satisfy them.
- 3) Did CPB and/or PBS attempt to engage in editorial control of this film in contravention of the contract with the filmmakers and/or these organizations’ legal authority?
- 4) Did personnel involved in series production of “America at a Crossroads” acknowledge to the filmmakers having personal, family or other associations which may have had a prejudicial influence on their decisions concerning the structure and content of “Islam vs. Islamists?”
- 5) Did PBS and WETA retain one or more individuals as advisors to the “Crossroads” series who had a conflict-of-interest that could reliably have been predicted to interfere with their ability to consider objectively “Islam vs. Islamists” on its merits? Did the filmmakers make known concerns on this score to Ms. Harrison and other CPB executives and what action, if any, was taken by CPB to rectify the situation?
- 6) Were journalistic ethics and a confidentiality agreement violated by one of the advisors engaged by PBS/WETA in the course of the production of this documentary? If so, was CPB made aware of such misconduct and what steps, if any, were taken to redress it?
- 7) Insofar as the selection of films for “America at a Crossroads” was pursuant to a rigorous competitive process, on what basis did the series host, Robert MacNeil, receive funding for his documentary, “The Muslim Americans”? How was this film selected to be part of “Crossroads” initial eleven-film roll-out?
- 8) Did the fact that two of the advisors who were recruited to advise on the selection of films for that roll-out appeared in Mr. MacNeil’s documentary influence the decision for it to be included?
- 9) To the extent that issues of “one-sidedness” and a failure to present diverse viewpoints have been cited as factors in the rejection of “Islam vs. Islamists” for the “Crossroads” series, was “The Muslim Americans” held to the same standard?

We believe that, given the considerable controversy associated with the disposition by the public broadcasting community of “Islam vs. Islamists,” it would be highly desirable if your review of these questions could be both thorough and

expeditious. While we understand that an arrangement has been fashioned between CPB and the filmmakers that will permit at least limited distribution of this documentary, your prompt investigation of the basis upon which it was previously denied national, common-carriage in prime time by the Public Broadcasting Service may contribute to future decisions by PBS affiliates and/or others that will enable the largest possible number of Americans – whose tax-dollars were used to make the film – to see it.

We also believe that your review can and should inform consideration by CPB and the Congress of possible systemic changes needed to fulfill the Corporation's mandate to encourage balanced and diverse viewpoints on the public airwaves in the future.

Sincerely,



SENATOR TOM COBURN




REP. TRENT FRANKS



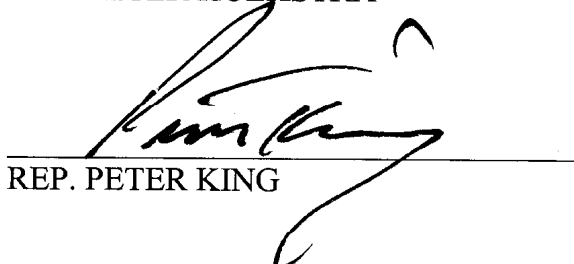
SENATOR JON KYL



REP. PETER HOEKSTRA



SENATOR JAMES INHOFE



REP. PETER KING