

November 18, 2008

Broadcasting Board of Governors
330 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20237

Dear Board of Governors,

It has been reported by Pro Publica, a public-interest and non-profit newsroom, that the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) provided over \$180,000 for a study of U.S. broadcasting in Arabic, *Alhurra*, to be conducted by the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy.¹ The study, entitled "An evaluation of *Alhurra* television programming," was completed in July but has not been made public. I am also told that the BBG commissioned another study of *Alhurra* to be done by the University of Missouri.

Please send me an un-redacted copy of each report by November 24, 2008.

Pro Publica reports that its attempts to obtain copies of the USC report through the authority of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) were rebuffed by BBG lawyers. The lawyers claimed the Board determined the report is exempt from FOIA transparency due to being "predecisional and deliberative process material." Please provide me the transcript of the Board meeting and a record of how each member of the Board voted when this determination was made.

As you know, the BBG has come under increased scrutiny from Congress, BBG whistleblowers and former officials, an interagency task force, and investigative journalists. This is due to a pattern of U.S. broadcasts providing unchallenged platforms to terrorists and other individuals hostile to U.S. policies. Many of these instances are documented on the website of my Senate Subcommittee for Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services, and International Security (<http://coburn.senate.gov/ffm>).

Unfortunately, it is impossible to know the extent of the damage from these broadcasts since the BBG fails to provide English transcripts for its over 40 languages services. Due to this

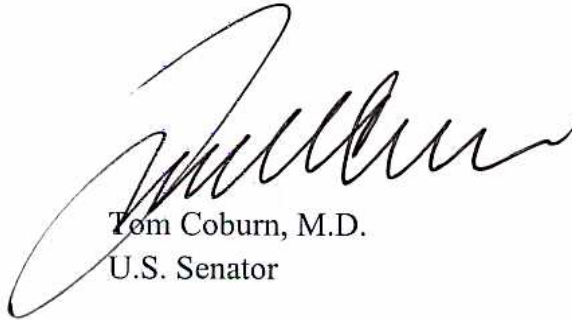
¹ <http://www.propublica.org/feature/usc-study-of-alhurra-withheld-from-public-inquiries-of-networks-operation-d/>

lack of transparency and accountability, studies of the BBG and its broadcasts are invaluable to those of us interested in U.S. public diplomacy oversight.

As you know, I support the public diplomacy mission of the Broadcasting Board of Governors and its responsibility to be “consistent with the foreign policy objectives of the U.S.” and to “provide a clear and effective presentation of the policies of the United States.”² Through public transparency and accountability, we will all be better equipped to insure U.S. international broadcasting fulfills its mission and does not lose tax-dollars to waste, mismanagement, and broadcasting that undermines U.S. strategic interests abroad.

Thank you for your prompt response to my request. If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact my staff, Trey Hicks at 202.224.2254.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Coburn', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the bottom left of the signature.

Tom Coburn, M.D.
U.S. Senator

² 22 USC 71 sec. 6202