

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Hearing on “Broadcasting Board of Governors: An Agency Defunct”
June 26, 2013**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Today we meet to discuss how best to reform the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the agency which oversees U.S. international broadcasters such as the Voice of America and Radio Free Asia.

Our international broadcasting has a very rich history. East Europeans have told us how critical Radio Free Europe broadcasts were to chipping away at the Iron Curtain, ending the Cold War. That’s an achievement.

While the Voice of America aims to provide listeners with objective news and information about United States foreign policy, the so-called “surrogate” broadcasters such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty beam news into closed societies, offering information those citizens are otherwise denied.

Each broadcasting service is full of enterprising reporters who literally risk life and limb to expose government corruption or report on human rights abuses. Reporters from these services have been killed. U.S. international broadcasting employees deserve to work under an organization that makes the most out of their talents.

Unfortunately, more and more, it seems that the structure of international broadcasting clips their wings. Legislation in the 1990s established the Broadcasting Board of Governors as an independent federal agency responsible for all U.S. non-military international broadcasting. Today, the BBG exercises authority over five distinct broadcasting services. Managed by a bi-partisan, part-time, presidentially-appointed board of nine individuals, “the Board” is supposed to set the priorities and overall strategic direction of U.S. international broadcasting, allocate resources, and safeguard journalistic integrity. But plagued by vacancies and infighting, the BBG has trouble accomplishing any of that.

In January, the State Department’s Inspector General depicted an agency with a dedicated staff attempting to serve in a dysfunctional structure. The BBG’s “dysfunction stems from a flawed legislative structure and acute internal dissension,” the report concludes, noting that a part-time board “cannot effectively supervise” operations. Indeed, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton testified to this Committee that the BBG “is practically a defunct agency in terms of its capacity to be able to tell a message around the world.” She went on to regret that “we’re abdicating the ideological arena.” I agree.

The stakes are very high. As we speak, governments around the world have stepped up efforts to influence opinion abroad and stifle dissent at home. In Pakistan, small local radio stations

broadcast messages that promote extremism and incite violence. The fight against terrorism and other threats to our national security must include a fight against bad ideas. If done well, the payoff of broadcasting is tremendous.

With an “information war” underway, U.S. international broadcasting must be as sharp as ever. This includes the broadcast entities themselves. The former head of Radio Free Europe once summed-up their mission this way: “irritate authoritarian regimes, inspire democrats, and create greater space for civil society.” Our goal here is to figure out how to do more of just that.