

TESTIMONY OF RYAN CROCKER BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, SEPTEMBER 24

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCaul,

It is an honor to appear before this Committee to discuss the roles and missions for the United States Agency for Global Media (USAGM). These are critical times for our country in the International arena, and USAGM plays a critical role.

I was privileged to serve on the Board of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (later USAGM) from 2013 to 2020. It was a bipartisan board, although my status is as an independent. This was a period in which the Board Chair was first a Democrat and then a Republican. It was also a period of historic change. Since its inception, the BBG had not had a CEO. Our board recognized this as a major structural flaw: One does not run an \$800 million corporation with no CEO and a part time. After verifying that there were no legal barriers to the establishment of a CEO position by the Board, we engaged members of the Senate and House to explain the issue and seek support for creating and filling a CEO slot. We found broad bipartisan backing. After a rigorous search led by then Board Chairman Jeff Shell, we selected John Lansing, a career journalist of extraordinary ability and accomplishment. He is also an extraordinary manager. He reviewed the entire USAGM structure, identifying problems and proposing solutions. He dramatically improved coordination and cooperation among the entities and agencies, eliminating redundancies and building a strong sense of common purpose that not only realized more efficient use of resources, but improved the quality of our output. Congress remained engaged on the issue, and passed legislation establishing a CEO position that would be nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCaul, the most important asset USAGM has is the people who work for its cause, from reporters around the world who have the ability and courage to report the news accurately and honestly. In many cases, they do so at great personal risk of harassment, imprisonment, physical abuse and even death – all for telling the truth in an arena of totalitarian lies. This is at the core of the USAGM mission, and has been since the founding of VOA during the darker days of WW II. It also means finding the very best people for senior positions whose values and abilities are consistent with that mission and who will inspire and lead their agencies and entities. That effort became easier with John Lansing at the helm. Admired and respected throughout the media, he in turn attracted the best and the brightest. It made our job as a Board considerably easier. I can say with a total lack of modesty that we fielded the A Team. Two of its members sit before you – Amanda Bennett who headed VOA and Jamie Fly, former CEO of RFE/RL. They can tell you their stories. Suffice it for me to say that you simply cannot find more capable and dedicated leaders. And it should not surprise you to know that they worked closely with each other. The best gravitate to the best. Among the leaders who are not here is Alberto Fernandez who headed the Middle East Broadcasting Network – MBN. A former Foreign Service colleague. Alberto speaks nearly perfect Arabic. Good enough to go on Arabic language news programs where he would out think, out talk and when necessary out shout political adversaries in their own language. He also has the moral courage to shine light on the most sensitive issues in the region such as corruption. The same is true of Libby Liu and later Bay Fang as CEOs of Radio Free Asia. You will not find more informed and vociferous critics of the Chinese government anywhere. Libby also worked to establish the Overseas Technology Fund (OTF) with the mission of circumventing the efforts of

autocratic regimes such as China to block the broadcast of the truth. Ambassador Kornbluh will be speaking to that as Chairman of the OTF Board of Directors.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCaul, I think it is very important to note not just who we selected for these critical positions, but how. These hiring decisions were made by unanimous votes of the Board. Democrats and Republicans came together to decide who could best serve USAGM and the nation. There were no partisan votes. This is a matter of great importance to me personally. As a Foreign Service officer, I served six times as an American Ambassador abroad. Three times I represented Republican Administrations, and three times Democratic. I served the American people, not a political party. Even in this time of hyper-partisanship, the USAGM Board on which I was privileged to serve was able to maintain its focus on the national security interests of the United States and to act accordingly, getting the right people in the right places and insuring that the mission of the agency was properly and effectively implemented.

That Board was dissolved in June, in accordance with the legislation establishing a Presidentially nominated and Senate confirmed CEO position. We expected this. What we did not expect was the wholesale firing of the agency and entity heads we had worked so hard to identify and recruit. Nor did we expect that the Agency's career executives would be dismissed or sidelined. CEO Pack's actions have demoralized Agency staff, most critically our reporters in the field. The firewall, which has been the guarantor of objective and honest reporting for more than 75 years, is under attack. We are in danger, I believe, of seeing USAGM transformed into precisely the propaganda mouthpiece we have so vigorously condemned in places like China and Russia.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCaul, I cannot say it better than William Harlan Hale did in that first VOA broadcast in February 1942. Speaking in German and aiming to counter Nazi propaganda, he said this: "Here speaks a voice from America. Every day at this time, we will bring you the news of the war. The news may be good. The news may be bad. We shall tell you the truth." And that is what VOA and its sister agencies have done ever since. Our reputation for telling the truth has been a core element of our strength as a nation. Now it is in danger, putting at risk not only our national values but also our national security.

Thank you.