



GOVERNMENT
ACCOUNTABILITY
PROJECT

1612 K Street, NW, Suite #1100
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 457-0034 | info@whistleblower.org

By Email

Michael Pack
Chief Executive Officer
U.S. Agency for Global Media
330 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20237

Robert R. Reilly
Director
Voice of America
330 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20237

January 8, 2021

Re: Protected Whistleblower Disclosures of Illegal Planned Activity on January 11, 2020 at the Voice of America Grossly Misusing Government Resources and Endangering Public Health and Safety

Dear Messrs. Pack and Reilly:

We, Government Accountability Project, represent employees of your agencies who are whistleblowers and who wish to remain anonymous. We are providing this notice to advise you that your plan to broadcast on January 11, 2021 – worldwide through Voice of America (VOA) channels – a live address by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at VOA headquarters to VOA staff endangers public health and safety, violates law, rule and regulation and grossly wastes government resources.

On January 4, 2021, Mr. Reilly sent an email to VOA staff announcing the plan for the Secretary's January 11 speech. It states, in full, and with emphasis added:

I am pleased to announce that U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo will come to VOA headquarters in the Cohen Building on Monday, January 11, 2021 to speak about the importance of VOA and the challenges facing the United States in the world today.

The program will begin at 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time in the auditorium and will last about half an hour. *It will be broadcast live by the services that are on the air at that time.* The video and transcript will be made available to the house for later use as well.

In accordance with COVID-19 protocols, *seating in the auditorium* will be limited. Information about how to attend virtually will be forthcoming.

VOA staff members interested in attending this event must RSVP to publicrelations@voanews.com by the close of business on Thursday, January 7.

Michael Pack
Robert R. Reilly
Re: Protected Whistleblower Disclosures
January 8, 2021
Page 2

It is a tribute to all of your efforts that Secretary Pompeo is making this visit. We hope to see many of you in person and virtually for this event

Notwithstanding the shocking and tragic events of January 6, preparations for the speech continue. Yesterday, January 7, VOA posted a Media Advisory on its website publicly announcing the speech.¹ Notably, it states, with emphasis added:

Secretary Pompeo's remarks will be open for press coverage and available to VOA language services and affiliates worldwide. *Due to social distancing requirements, in person coverage is not available.*

Given the closure of the event to outside media – ostensibly “[d]ue to social distancing requirements” – your decision to stage the speech before a live audience of VOA employees is especially brazen. It is also disingenuous. You cannot use the COVID-19 pandemic's public health risks to outside reporters as an excuse for excluding them and then “invite” your employees to attend.

Plainly, the use of a live audience in the midst of the pandemic endangers that audience – regardless of precautions. That is especially true here because the chosen setting for the speech is the VOA auditorium – a rarely used, windowless space. In other words, the planned speech before a live audience of VOA staff is a specific danger to public health and safety.

The decision to broadcast the speech worldwide through VOA channels is also a violation of law, rule and policy. We all know that Secretary Pompeo is no stranger to the media. On January 5, 2020, the State Department posted verbatim transcripts of two sympathetic interviews he gave to the Epoch Times and on the Bloomberg News David Rubenstein Show on the challenges the nation faces – the topic of his VOA address.² Both Epoch Times and Bloomberg News published stories based on the interviews.³

¹ *Live Address by Secretary of State Pompeo at VOA on January 11* (Jan. 7, 2017), available at <https://www.insidevoa.com/a/pompeo-voa-address-1-11/5727187.html>.

² *Secretary Michael R. Pompeo With Jan Jekielek of The Epoch Times' American Thought Leaders Program* (Jan. 5, 2021), available at <https://www.state.gov/secretary-michael-r-pompeo-with-jan-jekielek-of-the-epoch-times-american-thought-leaders-program>; *Secretary Michael R. Pompeo With David Rubenstein of Bloomberg News* (Jan. 5, 2021), available at <https://www.state.gov/secretary-michael-r-pompeo-with-david-rubenstein-of-bloomberg-news>.

³ Epoch Times, *EXCLUSIVE Video: Sec. Mike Pompeo: China's Communist Party Is 'Inside the Gates'* (Jan. 5, 2021), available at <https://www.theepochtimes.com/c-american-thought-leaders>;

Michael Pack
Robert R. Reilly
Re: Protected Whistleblower Disclosures
January 8, 2021
Page 3

The planned broadcast event by VOA is different. The statutory firewall protects VOA journalists and editors from outside political meddling. A broadcast speech by the outgoing Secretary of State on topics on which he has been widely covered should be seen for what it is: the use of VOA to disseminate political propaganda in the waning days of the Trump administration. As proposed, the planned coverage by language services will be one-sided and lacking the necessary objectivity protected by the firewall. It is political meddling.

The event is also a gross misuse of government resources. We understand that, currently, 18 employees are working on event preparations. But for that assignment, they would not be producing editorial content for VOA services. On the day of the event, we further understand that eight employees have been assigned to work in the VOA auditorium and 10 elsewhere around VOA headquarters. Additionally, we understand \$4,000 in taxpayer funds have been spent to date. The event is plainly a publicity stunt devoid of public interest and thus constitutes a gross misuse of government resources.

For these reasons, we request that the Secretary's speech not be broadcast live through VOA services and that no live VOA audience be used. Based on past experience, we expect you to disregard and thus reject this request. Accordingly, we are providing this notice to the federal agencies responsible for oversight and investigations and the protection of whistleblowers.

Very truly yours,

/s/

DAVID Z. SEIDE
Government Accountability Project

cc: House Foreign Affairs Committee
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General
U.S. Office of Special Counsel

Bloomberg News, *Pompeo Cites China, North Korea as Trump's Unfinished Business* (Jan. 4, 2021), available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-04/pompeo-cites-china-north-korea-as-trump-s-unfinished-business>.