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U.S. Rep. Gallagher: Demands answers on DHS disinformation board

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—Reps. Mike Gallagher (R-WI) and Scott Franklin (R-FL), alongside more than 170 colleagues, sent a letter to the Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to demand answers from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regarding the creation of its Disinformation Governance Board.

In part, the lawmakers wrote, "DHS has developed a stalwart reputation as a defender of the homeland primarily because it has focused on these mission sets and has remained non-partisan in achieving them. Implementing something as vague as a "Disinformation Governance Board" will distract from these mission sets and potentially tarnish the non-partisan reputation the Department has developed since its founding. "

In their letter, the lawmakers outlined three primary concerns with creation of the Board. First, they expressed ethical concerns about an organization charged with securing the homeland engaging in activities that could impact speech. Second, the members think the Department is overstepping its authority as a domestically focused organization by creating a board that would distract from its existing missions—especially during the ongoing border crisis. Third, the members are concerned with the appointment of Nina Jankowicz, a self-proclaimed "internationally-recognized expert on disinformation" to head up the board.[1] They also expressed concern with Ms. Jankowicz's questionable judgment on matters of disinformation and freedom of speech.

For these reasons, the lawmakers requested DHS to respond to the following questions thirty days from the date of receipt of this letter.

• Under what legal authority is DHS creating this Disinformation Governance Board?
• What is the Board's specific directive and mission? What authorities will it have under the Department?
• How does this Board help DHS protect the homeland from threats? Why is DHS putting valuable resources toward a mission that it appears to have no equity in when there is an ongoing crisis at our southern border?
• Why was Ms. Jankowicz chosen to head this Board? Who were the other candidates considered for this position? What qualifications and vetting procedures did the Department utilize when determining who would head up the Disinformation Governance Board?

The full text of the letter can be found HERE.

Background

On April 27th, DHS announced the creation of its Disinformation Governance Board, which was to be headed by Jankowicz, who previously worked as a fellow at the Wilson Center. According to a DHS Fact Sheet, the Department is "focused on disinformation that threatens the security of the American people, including disinformation spread by foreign states such as Russia, China, and Iran, or other adversaries such as transnational criminal organizations and human smuggling organizations." DHS's primary mission sets are countering terrorism, securing the border, securing cyberspace and infrastructure, upholding economic security, strengthening resilience, and strengthening DHS itself. These mission sets are generally domestically focused. Historically speaking, U.S. government disinformation efforts have been an international focus undertaken by the State Department's Global Engagement Center and members of the intelligence community.