

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 8, 2023

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write to request answers regarding taxpayer funding of the Global Disinformation Index and any other organizations that seek to censor the free flow of information.

The Global Disinformation Index (GDI) is a British-based organization that purports to provide a “neutral, independent, transparent index of a website’s risk of disinforming readers.” This organization has received hundreds of thousands of dollars from the U.S. taxpayer-funded National Endowment for Democracy and the State Department’s Global Engagement Center (GEC). The GDI has used this funding to create a list of news organizations for advertisers and business interests to abstain from doing business with in an attempt to limit these organizations’ participation in the marketplace of ideas. Recent reporting suggests that GDI listed several prominent right-leaning news organizations on their “blacklist,” which was sent to advertising firms around the globe.

Reports of taxpayer funding for censorship are troubling but unfortunately, no longer isolated. According to recent revelations from the Twitter files investigative series, the evidence suggests the GEC contracted with the Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) to provide expertise on combating online disinformation but instead received lists of ordinary Americans to silence on Twitter. These lists of American citizens marked for censorship bore no resemblance to the paid foreign bots that DFRLab promised to expose.

Taxpayers employ the State Department and all its officials to promote their interests and protect the Constitution. Paying foreign (and domestic) entities to perform what is essentially censorship is troubling on two fronts: it wastes taxpayer funds and undermines constitutional protections for freedom of speech. For these reasons, we request the U.S. Department of State cease all current and future taxpayer funding of the GDI and all other efforts from the State Department to fund “disinformation research” that silences American citizens. Further, we request answers to the following questions:

1. *How many entities is the State Department currently funding that implicate the free speech rights of American citizens?*
2. *What is the total amount of taxpayer funds that have been sent to third-party organizations that implicate the free speech rights of American citizens?*

3. *Has the State Department sought or received information on the methodology the GDI and DFRLab used to determine which organizations and individuals to place on their lists?*

We thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Buck". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ken Buck
Member of Congress