



One Hundred Fifteenth Congress  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20515

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April 10, 2018

The Honorable Kirstjen Nielsen  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC

Dear Secretary Nielsen:

I write to request additional information regarding the request for information (RFI) for media monitoring services that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS or the Department) issued on behalf of the National Protection and Programs Directorate (NPPD) on April 3, 2018.<sup>1</sup> As you may be aware, the RFI has raised a great deal of concern among some journalists and the public.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately instead of assuaging that concern with information, DHS' press secretary maligned those asking questions about the RFI as "tin foil hat-wearing, black helicopter conspiracy theorists,"<sup>3</sup> which was inappropriate and unhelpful. Indeed, DHS' response only exacerbated the concerns of those troubled by the RFI, including myself.

According to the RFI released last week, NPPD is seeking media monitoring services to support its ability to track "all media coverage related to the Department of Homeland Security," search online news and social media coverage, build targeted media lists, and identify media influencers, among other things.<sup>4</sup> With respect to "influencers," DHS indicated a potential vendor must have the capability of providing "contact details and any other information that could be relevant, including publications this influencer writes for, and an overview of the previous coverage

<sup>1</sup> Request for Information, Media Monitoring Services, Department of Homeland Security, RNBO-18-00041 (Apr. 3, 2018), *available at* <https://www.fbo.gov/index.php?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=22aa793f75ce05efd160cfa36d7a8acc&tab=core&tabmode=list>.

<sup>2</sup> See Michelle Fabio, "Department of Homeland Security Compiling Database of Journalists and 'Media Influencers,'" *Forbes* (Apr. 6, 2018), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michellefabio/2018/04/06/department-of-homeland-security-compiling-database-of-journalists-and-media-influencers/#189928cc6121>.

<sup>3</sup> Tyler Q. Holton (@SpoxDHS), Twitter, (Apr. 6, 2018, at 6:41 pm), <https://twitter.com/SpoxDHS/status/982372727309963264>.

<sup>4</sup> See *supra* n. 1.

published by the media influencer.”<sup>5</sup> The collection of this information, according to the RFI, will help NPPD “better reach Federal, state, local, tribal and private partners.”<sup>6</sup>

Journalists, however, have raised concerns over how the information gathered will be used, particularly in light of the manner in which the White House vilifies the press.<sup>7</sup> One wrote: “The real question, of course, is what the government plans to do with the information it compiles, and there’s been no comment on that beyond what is in the posting . . . Will those on the DHS media database be questioned more harshly coming in and out of the country? Will they have trouble getting visas to go to certain countries for their own reporting or personal vacations? Worse?”<sup>8</sup> Regrettably, instead of providing a cogent response to these questions, DHS merely responded that media monitoring is “standard practice,” and moved immediately to discredit the journalist through name-calling.

While there may be a legitimate purpose for certain media monitoring services, to date the Department has failed to provide one. Moreover, it has not provided specific information about how media monitoring services will advance its mission and how it will protect data about journalists and other media influencers from misuse or falling into the wrong hands. Accordingly, pursuant to Rule X(3)(g) and Rule XI of the Rule of the House of Representatives, please respond to the following questions and provide any additional documents and information you deem relevant by April 23, 2018:

1. Does DHS currently have in place a media monitoring contract for NPPD? If so, please describe the scope of work, the start and end date of the contract, the cost, and the vendor. If not, please describe whether and how NPPD is presently performing media monitoring and why NPPD requires a media monitoring service now when it has not in the past.
2. Please identify all existing media monitoring contracts at DHS and its components. Please note any differences in the scope of work sought and the rationale. For example, RNBO-18-00041 appears unique in its request for information regarding “influencers.”
3. Please describe, in detail, how the type of media monitoring services described by RNBO-18-00041 will inform and enhance the activities of NPPD.
4. Do you anticipate that NPPD will share databases or information generated from its media monitoring services with other components of the Department? If so, please describe how and for what purpose.
5. How will DHS-NPPD ensure that the data collected pursuant to any media monitoring program – should DHS-NPPD ultimately decide to procure such a service – is not used for purposes outside NPPD’s media monitoring program? Additionally, please describe the efforts NPPD will undertake, and/or the capabilities it will require of a potential vendor, to

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<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> See Fabio, *supra* n. 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

prevent the breach of any database containing information about any journalist, influencer, blogger, social media commentator, or other individual collected pursuant to NPPD's media monitoring program.

I would be remiss if I did not once again raise concern regarding the way DHS' press office initially responded to concerns over the RFI and the name-calling that ensued. A journalist raised questions about a potential media monitoring program. That behavior is beneath the Department and it is an affront to an open, transparent government. I implore you to demand more of those who represent you and the Department to the press.

I appreciate your attention to this inquiry, and I look forward to your response. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Alison Northrop, Chief Director for Oversight, at (202) 226-2616.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON  
Ranking Member