

No More Terrorist Tirades on the U.S. Taxpayer's Dime

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2008 Foreign Operations Spending Bill Aims to Fix Problems at Alhurra.

(Washington, DC)—Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ) announced that today the Fiscal Year 2008 Foreign Operations spending bill moved forward with tough provisions that he sought to bring better oversight and transparency to Alhurra—the U.S. taxpayer funded Arab language television network in the Middle East. In addition, this bill marks the first time since Alhurra launched in 2004 that the House Foreign Operations Subcommittee has denied full funding for it. The funding request was made by the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), which oversees international broadcasting, including Alhurra.

"This bill sends a clear message to the BBG and Alhurra that Congress will not throw away U.S. taxpayer dollars on a television network that gives free airtime to anti-American terrorists. I sincerely hope that the BBG will take the cut in their request for funding seriously and finally focus their attention and resources on fixing the egregious programming problems at Alhurra before any more damage is done," said Rothman.

Specifically, the appropriators refused to provide the BBG with the \$11.1 million it requested for new programming at Alhurra. Instead, the 2008 spending bill will provide \$4.28 million for the transparency program that Rothman proposed in March, which calls for 24/7 live streaming, archiving and translation of Alhurra's original programming.

This wake-up call from Congress comes in response to months of public revelations about awful programming decisions made by Alhurra's newly appointed News Director, Larry Register. The appalling decisions consisted of live and unedited broadcasts of terrorists, including Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hasan Nasrallah, Hamas leader Ismail Haniya, and an alleged al Qaeda operative who reportedly expressed joy that 9/11 rubbed "America's nose in the dust."

Provisions in the spending bill also require the State Department's Inspector General and the BBG to jointly investigate the decision-making process between 2006 and 2007 that led to multiple violations of U.S. written policy against broadcasting live interviews with terrorists and report on their findings to the Appropriations Committee.

Finally, the 13-member Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, on which Congressman Rothman serves, included language requested by Rothman specifically criticizing the programming decisions that have been made at Alhurra under the leadership of Mr. Register.

Alhurra exists to counter the anti-American biases that pervade the Arab world's news media and promote American values. However, Rothman contends that Mr. Register has repeatedly compromised that mission by allowing hate-mongers on air to spew anti-American and anti-Israel rhetoric. In May, Rothman and Rep. Mark Kirk (R-IL) organized a letter signed by 9 of 13 members of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee that called on Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to replace Mr. Register as the News Director of the U.S. taxpayer-funded Alhurra television network.

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