

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

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February 9, 2024

Mr. Duff Steward  
Chief Executive Officer  
GSD&M  
828 W 6th St  
Austin, TX 78703

Dear Mr. Steward:

As you likely know, the United States military is facing the worst recruiting crisis in the 50 years of the all-volunteer force. In Fiscal Year 2023 the Department of Defense, across all branches, missed its recruiting goals by 41,000 recruits. Every military service except the Marine Corps and Space Force missed their recruiting goals. The Air Force fell short of its goal of recruiting 26,877 airmen by 2,700 recruits, nearly 10% short of its goal. That is the worst recruiting outcome for the Air Force in more than 20 years. Reserve and Air National Guard recruitment outcomes were even more concerning.

As the primary advertising agency for the United States Air Force, your firm should face significant scrutiny regarding its role in the recruiting crisis. United States taxpayers have entrusted GSD&M with \$741 million over 10 years to make the United States Air Force an attractive career choice for young Americans. The House Committee on Armed Services (HASC) has a significant interest in how you spent those resources and your agency's failure to appeal to new recruits.

As members of the Military Personnel Subcommittee of HASC, we intend to thoroughly investigate our military recruitment failures, including the policies and strategies of the contractors the Department of Defense (DoD) entrusted with billions of dollars for advertising. The extent to which the DoD and its contractors have prioritized social justice and political correctness over national security, readiness and lethality will be a major focus of this investigation.

Section 1555 of the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (FY24 NDAA) requires that any entity placing advertisements on behalf of the Department of Defense certify that the entity does not place advertisements in news sources based on personal or institutional political preferences or biases, or determinations of misinformation. This provision responds to concerns that advertising blacklists are effectively created by groups like NewsGuard Technologies and the Global Disinformation Index by providing advertising firms with lists which rank or rate media by subjective and often political criteria which, in turn, artificially limit

military recruitment advertisements' reach. These organizations' well-documented bias means that such blacklists exclude media outlets read or viewed by those most likely to be interested in military service. Also, it is important to note that Section 1555 prevents the Department of Defense recruitment from contracting with any advertising agency that utilizes such blacklisting services, not just for military recruitment purposes.

In furtherance of the Committee's oversight responsibilities, we request that you provide answers to the following questions by February 26, 2024, so that the Committee may prepare for a future hearing on this subject.

1. Does GSD&M, its parent company, or any of its subsidiaries directly or indirectly utilize NewsGuard, the Global Disinformation Index or any company or service the function of which is to advise on the censorship, blacklisting, or placement of advertisements based on personal or institutional political preferences or biases, content-based ratings or rankings, or any other content-based criteria, or under the stated function of "fact checking" or otherwise removing or identifying "misinformation"?
  - a. If so, when did your firm begin using such services and what was the cost of those services?
2. Does GSD&M, its parent company or any of its subsidiaries utilize the companies or services identified in question 1 in the placement of recruitment advertisements for the Department of Defense?
  - a. If so, was any part of the cost of these services covered by funding from the Department of Defense?
3. If you answer yes to questions 1 or 2, how does GSD&M intend to comply with Section 1555 of the FY24 NDAA?
4. If you answer yes to question 1 or 2, will you commit to the House Armed Services Committee to forego using those services in placing recruiting advertisements going forward? If not, why?
5. The United States taxpayer expects that military recruitment advertisements will be shown to the broadest possible audience of potential recruits. Do you agree that the use of NewsGuard, the Global Disinformation Index, or a similar company or service violates your fiduciary duty to the Department of Defense and the United States taxpayer? Why or why not?
6. Please provide the committee with the name of the media outlet and the total amount of the advertising buy for all ad placements in excess of \$5,000.

Because hearings are likely on this matter, we are asking you to preserve all records, documents, communications your firm has had with NewsGuard, GDI or other groups who have engaged in

ensorship using ratings, content-based rankings, fact-checking services or act as “misinformation” monitors.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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Jim Banks  
Member of Congress



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Mike Waltz  
Member of Congress



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Jack Bergman  
Member of Congress



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Elise Stefanik  
Member of Congress