Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

January 11, 2005

The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

We are writing to request that the Government Accountability Office examine the use of covert propaganda by departments and agencies under the Bush Administration.

In the past year, GAO has released two legal analyses finding that the Department of Health and Human Services and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy violated the congressional prohibition on publicity and propaganda by distributing fabricated video news reports. Last week, we learned that the Department of Education paid a conservative commentator to support the No Child Left Behind Act in television and radio appearances.

The federal use of covert propaganda is unethical, damaging to our democracy and open society, and, as you know, illegal. While the three incidents described above are deeply troubling and are a cause for concern in their own right, it would be abhorrent to our system of government if these incidents were part of a pattern of covert propaganda funded with taxpayer dollars.

In particular, we request that GAO:

(1) Survey federal departments and agencies to identify and describe all contracts signed since January 1, 2001, with public relations firms, advertising agencies, media organizations, and individual members of the media. Please include in the description (a) the costs of each contract, (b) a summary of the purposes of the contract, (c) the method by which the contract was awarded, and (d) a description of the work performed under the contract.

(2) In the case of any contract identified under (1) that relies on subcontracts, identify and describe the subcontracts. Please include in the description (a) the costs of each subcontract, (b) a summary of the purposes of the subcontract, (c) the method by which the subcontract was awarded, and (d) a description of the work performed under the subcontract.

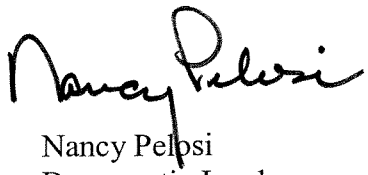
(3) Assess whether the contracts and subcontracts comply with the prohibitions on publicity and propaganda and the requirements of the Anti-Lobbying Act.

We recognize that a comprehensive survey of federal departments and agencies may be a large undertaking. We ask that you focus your initial attention on covert propaganda related to the following seven topics:

The No Child Left Behind Act and its implementation;
The Medicare Modernization Act and its implementation;
Tax legislation signed or proposed by President Bush;
Social Security reform;
The war in Iraq;
Homeland security;
Energy and the environment.

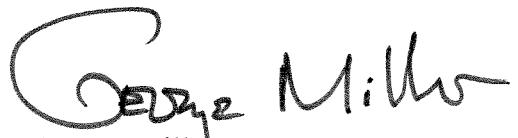
We are available to work with you to refine this request as you proceed with the investigative work.

Sincerely,

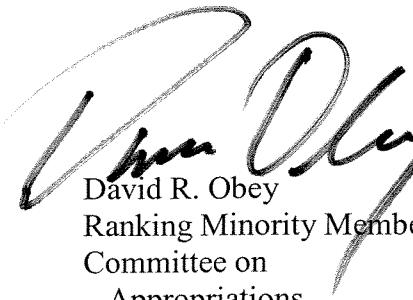


Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader

Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Government Reform



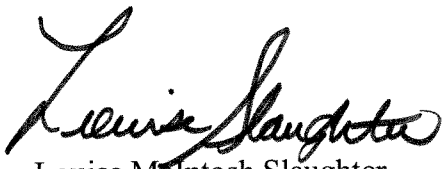
George Miller
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce



David R. Obey
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Appropriations

Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources
Committee on Government Reform

John D. Dingell
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce



Louise McIntosh Slaughter
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Rules

Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Homeland Security