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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

February 7, 2025

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary
Department of Defense

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

Since 2019, I've engaged in oversight of the Office of Net Assessment (ONA) within the Department of Defense (DoD) requesting information and documents related to Professor Stefan Halper's contracting work and ONA's contracting practices more broadly.¹ To date, ONA has failed to provide full and complete responses to my inquiries.²

As part of my oversight, in January 2020, I requested that ONA "provide a list of all contracts issued for each year over the last five years, the title of each funded project, and the total cost of each contract to the taxpayer."³ I also asked that ONA specify which of these projects were considered classified research.⁴ On February 5, 2020, ONA produced a list of contracted work, but classified all of it.⁵ On June 18, 2020, I wrote again to ONA noting that the list was improperly classified and only served to hide information that the taxpayers ought to know about.⁶ Accordingly, I requested that the entire list of contracts and funded projects be declassified and provided to my office.⁷ In response, on July 1, 2020, ONA stated that "it remains [Director Baker's] judgement that the previous classified enclosure should remain classified."⁸ Such a position is indefensible and is designed to prevent embarrassment, which my oversight has previously highlighted.

¹ Letter from Sen. Charles E. Grassley, Chairman, Senate Finance Committee, to the Honorable Mark Esper, Secretary, Department of Defense (July 12, 2019), [https://www.grassley.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2019-07-12%20CEG%20to%20DoD%20\(Halper%20Contracts\)_0.pdf](https://www.grassley.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2019-07-12%20CEG%20to%20DoD%20(Halper%20Contracts)_0.pdf); Letter from Sen. Charles E. Grassley, Chairman, Senate Finance Committee, to the Honorable Mark Esper, Secretary, Department of Defense (Oct. 31, 2019), On File with Committee Staff; Letter from Sen. Charles E. Grassley, Chairman, Senate Finance Committee, to James Baker, Director, Office of Net Assessment, Department of Defense (Jan. 22, 2020), On File with Committee Staff; Letter from Sen. Charles E. Grassley, Chairman, Senate Finance Committee, to James Baker, Director, Office of Net Assessment, Department of Defense (June 18, 2020), On File with Committee Staff; and Letter from Sen. Charles E. Grassley, Chairman, Senate Finance Committee, and Sen. Ron Johnson, Chairman, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, to the Honorable Mark Esper, Secretary, Department of Defense (Oct. 14, 2020), On File with Committee Staff.

² *Id.*

³ Letter from Sen. Charles E. Grassley (Jan. 22, 2020), *supra* note 1.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Letter from James Baker, Director, Office of Net Assessment, Department of Defense, to Sen. Charles E. Grassley, Chairman, Senate Finance Committee, (Feb. 5, 2020), On File with Committee Staff.

⁶ Letter from Sen. Charles E. Grassley (June. 18, 2020), *supra* note 1.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Letter from James Baker, Director, Office of Net Assessment, Department of Defense, to Sen. Charles E. Grassley, Chairman, Senate Finance Committee, (July 1, 2020), On File with Committee Staff.

For example, in my June 18, 2020, letter, I noted a paper entitled, “On the Nature of Americans as a Warlike People: Workshop Report,” which was authored by the Long Term Strategy Group (LTSG).⁹ The workshop paper highlighted the “level of American belligerency . . . [which is] the result of the persistence of Scotch-Irish culture in America, with its emphasis on violent responses to challenge[.]”¹⁰ It further stated that “[t]he role of Scotch-Irish culture must also be understood as having been reinforced by slaveholding, and American Protestant religious beliefs,” and that the Scotch-Irish culture was “shaped by endemic warfare that placed high value on violent and immediate personal responses to challenges and high loyalty to clan and kin.”¹¹ The paper continued by stating that the Scotch-Irish culture placed value “on violent immediate responses to challenges [which] shaped [their] views, and thus of the United States as a whole, toward war.”¹² Additionally, in my June 2020 letter, I also raised concerns that ONA spent taxpayer dollars on a paper titled, “A Technical Report on the Nature of Movement Patterning, the Brain and Decision-Making,” which focused largely on Vladimir Putin’s neurological development and potential Asperger’s diagnosis.¹³ These have nothing to do with ONA’s core mission, which is to produce a net assessment that measures our military capabilities against our foreign adversaries.

My oversight work has shown that ONA has lost its way. In June 2020, I introduced legislation that required ONA to perform the work it was created to do—complete a net assessment, which at that time hadn’t been done since 2007.¹⁴ That legislation included a provision requiring the DoD Inspector General (IG) perform a comprehensive review to determine ONA’s failure to comply with government contracting laws and regulations for research projects.¹⁵

I remain concerned that ONA is not performing its mission for the taxpayer and has engaged in financial waste. Moreover, ONA’s improper classification of taxpayer funded work product must come to an end. So that Congress can conduct independent oversight of ONA and determine how it has used taxpayer dollars to comply with its mission, please provide answers to the following questions by February 21, 2025:

1. From 2007 to 2025, provide all ONA produced net assessments.

⁹ *ON THE NATURE OF AMERICANS AS A WARLIKE PEOPLE: WORKSHOP REPORT*, Long Term Strategy Group (Apr. 2009), https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Litigation_Release/Litigation%20Release%20-%20On%20the%20Nature%20of%20Americans%20as%20a%20Warlike%20People%20Workshop%20Report%20%20200904.pdf.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 1.

¹¹ *Id.* at 1, 3.

¹² *Id.* at 4.

¹³ Elizabeth F. Ralph, *The Pentagon’s Secret Putin Diagnosis*, Politico (Feb. 5, 2015), <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/02/putin-autism-pentagon-114937>.

¹⁴ Sen. Charles E. Grassley, *Grassley: A Case in Waste, Fraud and Abuse: The Office of Net Assessment*, Press Release (July 2, 2020), <https://www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/grassley-case-waste-fraud-and-abuse-office-net-assessment> (“Last week I introduced an amendment to the Defense Bill that does several things. First, it reduces ONA’s budget to 10 million dollars a year. Second, it requires the Secretary of Defense to create a comprehensive plan to ensure that ONA performs an annual net assessment and complies with federal contracting requirements. Third, it requires the DOD Inspector General to study and report on ONA’s contracting failures and determine if a net assessment can be done for less than 10 million dollars. Fourth, it requires GAO to perform an audit of the effectiveness of the comprehensive plan.”).

¹⁵ *Id.*

2. When does ONA plan to conduct its next net assessment? Provide all records.¹⁶
3. Provide a list of all contracts issued for each year over the last ten years, the title of each funded project to the extent applicable, the recipient of taxpayer money, and the total cost of each contract to the taxpayer. Produce that information to me in unclassified form.

Thank you for your prompt review and responses. If you have any questions, please contact Tucker Akin on my Committee staff at (202) 224-7708.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary

¹⁶ "Records" include any written, recorded, or graphic material of any kind, including letters, memoranda, reports, notes, electronic data (emails, email attachments, and any other electronically created or stored information), calendar entries, inter-office communications, meeting minutes, phone/voice mail or recordings/records of verbal communications, and drafts (whether they resulted in final documents).