

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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May 25, 2021

Ms. Tammy L. Whitcomb
Inspector General
U.S. Postal Service
1735 N. Lynn Street
Arlington, VA 22209

Dear Inspector General Whitcomb:

We write to express concern about recent press reports that the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) has been using analysts from its Internet Covert Operations Program (iCOP) to perform intelligence operations on First Amendment activity.

According to these reports, iCOP analysts have been monitoring social media sites to look for posts that are “inflammatory” and then sharing details about the posts and individuals who posted the information with other federal law enforcement agencies.¹ USPIS confirmed this practice in recent briefings with Committee staff. These activities raise serious questions about the scope of the program, the extent of sharing of information among law enforcement agencies, and whether USPIS has the authority to conduct such an operation.

We understand that USPIS has a critical law enforcement responsibility to protect the people and facilities of the Postal Service. We also appreciate that since reports of iCOP being used in connection with First Amendment activity have become public, USPIS has put certain safeguards in place and is reviewing additional ways to protect First Amendment activities. Nevertheless, significant questions about iCOP remain.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that you perform an evaluation of iCOP, specifically reviewing the following questions:

1. What authority does USPIS have to conduct online intelligence operations on people in the United States, including those engaging in First Amendment activity?

¹ *The Postal Service Is Running a ‘Covert Operations Program’ that Monitors Americans’ Social Media Posts*, Yahoo News (Apr. 21, 2021) (online at <https://news.yahoo.com/the-postal-service-is-running-a-running-a-covert-operations-program-that-monitors-americans-social-media-posts-160022919.html>).

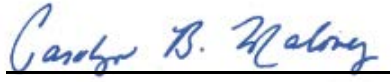
2. Why was the decision made to expand iCOP beyond its original focus on drug interdiction, when was the decision made, and who approved the decision?
3. What impact, if any, has the decision to employ iCOP analysts to monitor First Amendment activity had on the ability of these analysts to conduct criminal investigations?
4. What processes or mechanisms does iCOP use to review publicly available information? For example, does iCOP employ manual searches, continuous algorithmic searches, or other methods for this type of review?
5. What vendor does USPIS use to search publicly available information? What information is the vendor storing about searches and results, and how is this information secured? What is the total awarded value of the contract, and what are USPIS's obligated costs under the contract? When was the contract initiated, and when does it terminate?
6. With which agencies and organizations has iCOP shared information related to the monitoring of First Amendment activity?
7. How is information related to the monitoring of First Amendment activity being shared with federal, state, and local partners?
8. Do iCOP analysts use facial recognition technology to identify targets and compile additional information? If so, how is this information being used?
9. What kind of internal controls, review, transparency, and accountability mechanisms are in place to ensure that analysts and iCOP technology are not performing improper surveillance? Are additional controls needed?
10. Has anyone within the Postal Service raised concerns or complaints regarding iCOP's surveillance of First Amendment activities? How were such complaints addressed?

In addition to the questions above, we ask that you review any other facets of iCOP that you deem necessary to develop a comprehensive analysis of the program and its uses.

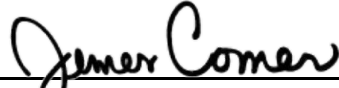
Please inform the Committee by Friday, June 4, 2021, whether you will perform this review and provide a timeline for initiation and completion. If you have any questions, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5051. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Ms. Tammy L. Whitcomb
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Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman



James Comer
Ranking Member