

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 28, 2019

The Honorable Steve A. Linick
Inspector General
U.S. Department of State
Office of the Inspector General
SA-39
1700 North Moore Street
Arlington, VA 22209

Dear Mr. Inspector General:

We request that your office conduct an investigation to determine why the State Department rescinded 2019 International Women of Courage (IWOC) award finalist status from Jessikka Aro, a Finnish journalist and campaigner against Kremlin disinformation and malign influence.

The Department has made claims to the media and to Congress that Ms. Aro “had not” been selected as a finalist and that the Department “incorrectly notified” Ms. Aro due to “a lack of coordination in communications with candidates and our embassies.” But a report (see attached) by the Democratic staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee calls those claims into question.

Democratic Committee staff reviewed State Department emails and documents which demonstrate that officials in Washington selected Ms. Aro as a finalist and communicated within the Department for months about her visit. Then, nearly one week prior to her trip to Washington to attend the IWOC award ceremony, the State Department told her she would not receive the award.

Many of the documents and emails Democratic Committee staff reviewed are included in the attached report, “Examining the State Department’s Claims about the International Women of Courage Award and Jessikka Aro.” Of particular note, Democratic Committee staff reviewed the following:

- A document drafted and approved in early January 2019 by officials in the Secretary of State’s Office of Global Women’s Issues (S/GWI), and distributed among 15 Department bureaus and offices, with the biographies of the ten finalists selected to receive the IWOC award. Of the ten finalists in that memo, all but Ms. Aro received the award from Secretary Pompeo on March 7.
- A form DS-2019 or "Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status" issued by the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA) which includes an attestation signed by an ECA official in early February stating that, in accordance with the

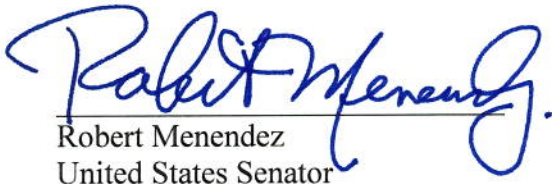
requirements of 22 CFR 62.12(b), Ms. Aro was “eligible and qualified for, and accepted into, the program in which he or she will participate” (emphasis added).

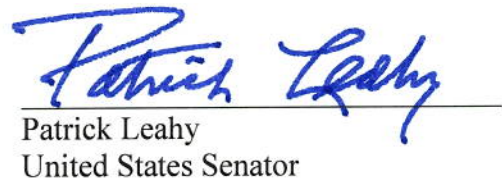
- An International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) agenda drafted by ECA officials in mid-February, which includes a customized individual travel program for Ms. Aro and proposes several private events for her participation in Chicago, centered on the themes of combatting disinformation and freedom of the press.

Furthermore, in early March, an article in Foreign Policy cited sources inside the Department who claimed that Ms. Aro’s award was rescinded because officials disagreed with social media posts she made criticizing President Trump’s attacks on the media and the rule of law. As we have seen evidence that State Department officials requested Ms. Aro to provide her social media handles after she had been accepted for the award program and prior to the Department’s revocation of her participation in the award ceremony, we find this allegation both potentially credible and disturbing.

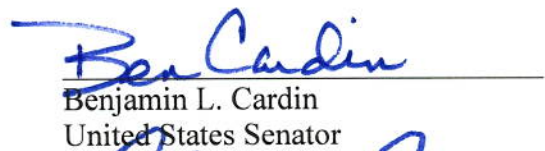
Please do not hesitate to contact our offices if you would like more information regarding this request, including the underlying evidence that informed the attached document. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

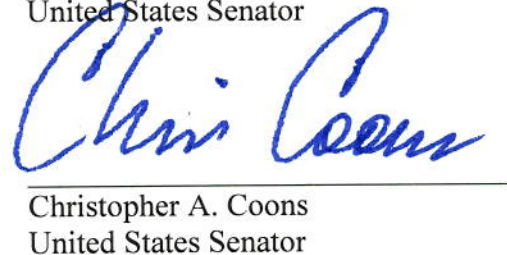

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

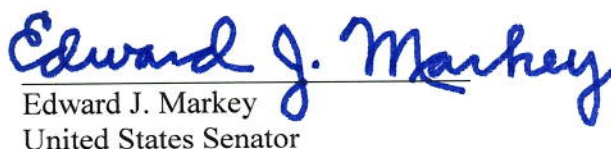

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

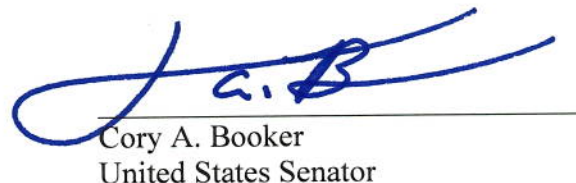

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator


Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator


Jeanne Shaheen
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Christopher A. Coons
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