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One Hundred Fifteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
www.foreignaffairs.house.gov

January 31, 2017

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Yesterday, from the White House podium, your spokesperson, Sean Spicer, announced that State Department employees who offer dissent to your executive order on immigration and refugees should “get with the program or they should go.” We are alarmed by Mr. Spicer’s apparent lack of knowledge about the way foreign policy is made in the United States.


We would like you to know that during the Administration of President Nixon, the State Department established a formal mechanism to allow personnel to express dissent from Administration policy. According to the State Department, “the Dissent Channel was created to allow its users the opportunity to bring dissenting or alternative views on substantive foreign policy issues, when such views cannot be communicated in a full and timely manner through regular operating channels or procedures.” For decades, the Dissent Channel has offered our diplomats the ability in critical circumstances to express concerns and warnings contrary to Administration policies. Notable examples have included dissents from policies toward Vietnam and Syria.

So it’s deeply troubling that your Administration isn’t interested in hearing different perspectives, especially those transmitted through the State Department’s revered Dissent Channel. The State Department’s Foreign Affairs Manual prohibits reprisal or disciplinary action against anyone who uses the Dissent Channel. We are requesting your assurances that State Department personnel will not be subject to harassment or retribution if they take advantage of the Dissent Channel or offer policy advice that doesn’t align with White House policy decisions.

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January 31, 2017
Page Two

Please reply as soon as possible confirming that your Administration will respect the law (P.L. 96-465) governing the State Department and the treatment of its personnel.

Sincerely,



ELIOT L. ENGEL
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Affairs



BRAD SHERMAN
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific



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Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and
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Vice Ranking Member



LOIS FRANKEL
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JOAQUIN CASTRO
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ROBIN L. KELLY
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BRENDAN F. BOYLE
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