

## OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BILL DELAHUNT

*At a hearing of the International Organizations, Human Rights,  
and Oversight Subcommittee*

*TV Marti: A Station in Search of an Audience?  
June 17, 2009*

This hearing will come to order. I note that there is intense interest in this topic. So I ask unanimous consent that any Member attending today's hearing be considered a member of the Subcommittee for the purposes of taking testimony and asking questions. Without objection, so ordered.

Today's hearing fulfills one of the core responsibilities of Congress, and this subcommittee in particular: to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely and effectively. In this case, US taxpayers have spent over half a billion – that's billion with a "b" – dollars since 1985 on two government-run stations that broadcast to Cuba.

Radio Marti and TV Marti are based in Miami and are managed by the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, known as OCB. The stated mission of these broadcasts is to support the Cuban people's right to information and to give them objective news. But TV Marti is jammed by the Cuban government and almost nobody in Cuba can watch it. Furthermore, it has been subject to an enormous amount of controversy. From biased broadcasts -- to questionable programming -- to reports of nepotism -- to political manipulation -- to criminal charges of corruption.

It's not just allegations: last year TV Marti's program director was convicted of taking over \$100,000 in kickbacks and sentenced to 27 months in prison. And the current director of OCB -- who is a holdover from the Bush Administration -- hired his wife's nephew as the chief of staff, even though he had no experience in broadcasting.

This has echoes of another US government program, supposedly to promote democracy in Cuba. A few years ago I asked the Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress, to look into that spending. It turned out that it was very difficult to tell where, exactly, the money went. But not all went to Cuba -- GAO discovered that some of it was spent in Miami on chocolates, and Sony Playstations, and cashmere sweaters. It was later discovered that an employee of the largest grantee was topping off purchases meant for dissidents for his own use -- to the tune of \$11,000 at CostCo. And the former chief of staff of the second largest grantee was just sentenced to 30 months in prison for stealing \$600,000 in federal funds.

This is not a pretty picture.

In any case, what is important for our purposes today is the basic question of whether the taxpayers are getting a fair return on their investment. Is there a more cost-effective way of getting objective information to the Cuban people? Of spreading American values? And most importantly, is anyone watching TV Marti?

TV Marti has been examined by various bodies, including the International Broadcasting Bureau, which oversees OCB, and the State Department Inspector General. Most reviews have found serious problems. Often the same

problems, over and over again. Only one review ever gave a positive grade, and that was a highly questionable State IG report in 2007 that many investigators do not take seriously. In fact -- the State IG at the time was later forced to resign amid charges of a political cover-up when he interfered with a Justice Department investigation of an unrelated matter.

So I asked GAO to conduct a thorough scrub of these stations. GAO is the gold standard when it comes to examining government programs. And I want to publicly praise them for their work.

What GAO found in this case was that there were continued problems with employee morale -- with adherence to journalistic standards -- with sloppy contracting -- with little transparency in the hiring of so-called “talent contractors.”

But what is most striking is that -- according to the most reliable figures compiled by the International Broadcasting Bureau -- TV Marti has a less than 1% audience in Cuba. Less than 1%. And now I’m quoting from the GAO report: “none of the 533 respondents to IBB’s telephone survey living in Havana reported watching TV Marti broadcasts during the past 12 months.”

Yet TV Marti consumes the lion’s share of the transmission budget for both stations. In Fiscal Year 2008, OCB spent 8 and a half million dollars on transmissions -- over 7 and a half million of that was for TV. 6 million of that was to fly a plane to broadcast to Havana – but by IBB’s own figures, it made no difference whatsoever in TV Marti’s audience.

That's why today's hearing is entitled "TV Marti: A Station in Search of an Audience?" Because I wanted to focus on what seems to me to be a most egregious waste of money. TV Marti does not seem to have an audience. It's a station that nobody sees. So why spend all this money on it? If something isn't working, doing more of the same will not produce a different result.

Now in its latest budget proposal, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, which is in charge of OCB, has suggested changing the format of TV Marti and cutting some staff as a cost-saving measure. But there are concerns as to whether this is enough of a change in focus, and whether some of these staff reductions may be retaliation for whistleblowers who spoke to GAO. Once the Obama Administration picks a permanent director for OCB, I intend to explore this further.

Because it's important to keep in mind the larger context. Both the US and Cuban governments have indicated a greater willingness toward dialogue. Things are changing, ever so slowly, in Cuba. Things are changing much more quickly in the US. Cuban-Americans can now travel to Cuba whenever they want, as much as they want. Most Americans are still prohibited from visiting. But that may change soon as well. In this context, does it make sense to continue to conduct these broadcasts? Should we experiment with newer and different technology? Or should we just scrap TV Marti and trust the American people to spread our values in Cuba?

Let me be clear: I believe that TV Marti, in its current form, is utterly useless. But I'm open to new ideas. If there are alternative ways to deliver video product, I'd like to hear them. I also realize that change is difficult. It takes

time. So to be responsible to the taxpayers, we should have a public discussion of this issue. And that's why we are here today.

Now I would like to turn to my friend and Ranking Member, Dana Rohrabacher, for any opening remarks that he may have.