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COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

RELEASED

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APR 22 1974

74-0056

B-129874

4x The Honorable Philip M. Crane  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Crane:

In your February 6, 1974, letter, you and your colleagues requested that we obtain information about certain groups engaged in lobbying efforts to influence U.S. policy on the alleged incarceration of "political prisoners" by the Republic of Vietnam. You asked us to determine the source of funds used to finance these efforts and whether those persons involved (1) were properly registered as lobbyists, (2) received foreign funds to finance the lobbying efforts, and (3) were required to register, and were registered, as foreign agents.

Since there was no indication that Federal funding was involved in the activities mentioned in your letter, we tried to determine whether those mentioned in your letter were registered as lobbyists and foreign agents and to obtain information on sources of funds used in their lobbying efforts, if such information was available in public records.

The Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act (2 U.S.C. 261 et seq.) requires that any person soliciting or receiving pay or other consideration, and whose principal purpose it is to aid in the accomplishment of the passage or defeat of any legislation by the Congress, must first register with the Clerk of the House of Representatives and with the Secretary of the Senate. The initial registration data must be supplemented by quarterly statements giving a detailed account of receipts and expenditures for lobbying. The information contained in the initial registration and the quarterly statements becomes a matter of public record.

The Foreign Agents Registration Act (22 U.S.C. 611 et seq.) requires that any person engaged in propaganda or other activities for or on behalf of foreign governments, foreign political parties, or other foreign principals must file a registration statement with the Department of Justice. The initial registration statement is to be kept current by supplemental statements filed every 6 months as long as the agent is engaged in activities on behalf of the foreign principal. Any time propaganda is distributed by the foreign agent, a report, including a copy of the propaganda, must be filed with the Department of Justice. All information filed in these reports becomes a matter of public record.

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Our review of the records of the Clerk of the House, the Secretary of the Senate, and the Department of Justice showed that none of those mentioned in your letter were registered, either as lobbyists or as foreign agents. Also, we found no information on these groups in the Internal Revenue Service where records pertaining to recognized charitable organizations are open to public examination. The absence of such public registration data precludes us from answering your specific questions about the sources of funds used in the lobbying efforts.

We did not attempt to determine whether the named individual or groups should be registered as lobbyists or foreign agents. The statutes regulating registrations are criminal in nature, and the question of whether those persons involved in these efforts were in compliance with the statutes would be determined by the Department of Justice.

We are enclosing a copy of a report recently issued by GAO entitled "Effectiveness of the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938, as Amended, and Its Administration by the Department of Justice" (B-177551, Mar. 13, 1974). We believe the findings and conclusions of that report would be of interest to you.

We are sending a copy of this reply to each of the members who cosigned your letter.

We do not plan to distribute this letter further unless you and your cosigners agree or publicly release its contents.

Sincerely yours,



Comptroller General  
Deputy of the United States

Enclosure