

ELIOT L. ENGEL, NEW YORK  
CHAIRMAN

JASON STEINBAUM  
STAFF DIRECTOR



MICHAEL T. MCCAUL, TEXAS  
RANKING REPUBLICAN MEMBER

BRENDAN P. SHIELDS  
REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

One Hundred Sixteenth Congress  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
2170 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
[www.foreignaffairs.house.gov](http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov)

**RECEIVED**

**By ESEC at 3:02 pm, Aug 21, 2020**

August 21, 2020

The Honorable Chad W. Wolf  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Mr. Wolf:

I am deeply concerned by the plight of sixteen Voice of America (VOA) journalists who must depart the United States in the coming days following the failure of their employing agency, the United States Agency for Global Media (USAGM), to seek extensions for their J-1 visas.

Voice of America is a critically important tool that has long helped project American democratic values and uncensored, factual news and information into some of the world's most closed societies. VOA has long depended on foreign journalists to help gather information and present stories to foreign audiences in multiple languages. Some of the individuals come from non-democratic countries where they could face retaliation for their work with VOA upon their return home.

Without action, some of these journalists whose visas have already expired must depart the country as soon as August 23, and others will have to leave soon after. I urge you to make use of all available authorities at your discretion to extend the grace period during which these individuals will be permitted to remain in the country in order to identify options that will allow them to remain safe and hopefully continue their important work. The U.S. Government hired these individuals as uniquely qualified to help us achieve a important foreign policy objective. Some of them had their contracts extended just in the last few months. They deserve better than to be kicked out of the country because the new leadership at USAGM has failed to act.

The Honorable Chad W. Wolf  
August 21, 2020  
Page Two

I thank you for your prompt attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eliot L. Engel". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name.

ELIOT L. ENGEL  
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Carl C. Risch  
Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State

Enclosure

U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services  
*Office of the Director* (MS 2000)  
Washington, DC 20529-2000



**U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services**

September 16, 2020

The Honorable Eliot L. Engel  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Engel:

Thank you for your August 21, 2020 letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Acting Secretary Wolf asked that I respond on his behalf.

The J-1 exchange visitor program fosters global understanding through educational and cultural exchanges. All J-1 nonimmigrant exchange visitors are expected to return to their home countries upon completion of the program.

In your letter, you express support for several journalists seeking to extend their J-1 nonimmigrant status. You request DHS make use of all available authorities at its discretion to extend the grace period for these journalists to remain in the United States. Please note that the applicable regulations at 8 CFR 214.2(j) do not confer authority to DHS to extend the grace period at its discretion.<sup>1</sup> Further, the U.S. Department of State (DOS) plays the primary role in administering the J-1 exchange visitor program. Therefore, we defer to our colleagues at DOS to more fully address your concerns.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this issue. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (202) 272-1940.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Edlow", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joseph Edlow  
Deputy Director for Policy

---

<sup>1</sup> For additional resources and information about possible immigration options, we recommend the individuals visit the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).