

Federal Agencies Have Been Sending Employees Links To White Nationalist And Conspiracy Websites For Months

A BuzzFeed News investigation found that an arm of the Justice Department and the Department of Labor have shared stories from VDare, a white nationalist publication, with federal employees on multiple occasions over the last two years.

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Leah Millis / Reuters

U.S. Attorney General William Barr

An arm of the Justice Department regularly sent summaries and links to articles from an online white nationalist publication over the last year, a BuzzFeed News investigation has found. In addition, similar newsletters sent to the Labor Department, ICE, HUD, and the Department of Homeland Security included links and content from hyperpartisan and conspiracy-oriented publishers.

In daily bulletins about media coverage for the department's Executive Office for Immigration Review, which runs the nation's immigration courts, a government contractor sometimes included links to VDare, an anti-Semitic

and racist site whose editor who has claimed that American culture is under threat from nonwhite peoples. That contractor, a Dade City, Florida-based company called TechMIS, also compiles newsletters for other agencies, including the Department of Labor, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the Office of Housing and Urban Development.

While these newsletters typically shared articles from local and mainstream national news outlets — including BuzzFeed News — they also regularly delivered content from partisan publications touting anti-immigration rhetoric and conspiracy theories. Among these publications: the Western Journal, a [hyperpartisan publisher](#) whose founder [once questioned](#) if then-presidential candidate Barack Obama was Muslim, and the Epoch Times, a newspaper [associated with the Chinese Falun Gong movement](#) and whose related media properties have [backed QAnon](#), a conspiracy theory claiming a group of high-ranking officials known as the “Deep State” is subverting President Donald Trump’s goals.

On Thursday, BuzzFeed News reported that [an immigration judges union sent a letter of complaint to EOIR](#) for its inclusion in an August newsletter of a VDare blog post that attacked its members with anti-Semitic slurs. After publication of that story, an EOIR press secretary said that the Department of Justice “condemns Anti-Semitism in the strongest terms” and that the post should not have been included. A former senior DOJ official said that the email in question was “generated by a third-party vendor that utilizes keyword searches to produce news clippings for staff. It is not reviewed or approved by staff before it is transmitted.”

“That’s absolutely incorrect,” said TechMIS CEO Steven Mains, adding that EOIR was the most specific and particular of the company’s clients. The agency’s staff would review its work “down to misspellings” if there was anything wrong before sending, he said.

A cursory review of EOIR newsletters by BuzzFeed News found two more mentions of VDare articles; Mains confirmed those and noted there were four others, saying that VDare had been included on seven occasions out of about 20,000 links and articles sent from September 2018, when TechMIS's relationship with the organization began.

"These discoveries are deeply disturbing," said Becca Lewis, a research affiliate at Data & Society, who studies online radicalization. "Unfortunately, they mark a continuation of a long history in which government agencies, and particularly law enforcement agencies, have promoted and enforced white supremacist and racist agendas. This also unfortunately shows that many white supremacist and far-right publications that seem to be on the 'fringes' of society actually have huge mainstream influence and impact."

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On Friday afternoon, immigration court employees were informed that they would no longer receive the briefing and were told to subscribe to a DOJ-wide briefing if they were interested. This instruction was sent hours after BuzzFeed News reached out to DOJ officials for comment on the discovery of the additional VDare links.

"After review of our daily news aggregation emails, we have determined that the sampling was over inclusive and contained non-news sources," EOIR spokesperson Kathryn Mattingly said in a statement. "EOIR will no longer be distributing a daily news briefing to its staff. EOIR strongly condemns anti-Semitism and white nationalism. Those hateful beliefs do not reflect the

views of EOIR employees and the Department of Justice.”

She added that EOIR would not be renewing its contract with TechMIS.

One immigration court employee told BuzzFeed News they perceived a shift in the news sources included in their emailed media briefings after Trump took office.

“It shows an increasing effort to politically charge the perspective of immigration judges who are being tasked with being neutral judges who apply the law,” said the employee, who was not authorized to speak on the matter publicly. “The administration has been taking steps to make the court a political weapon in various ways, some big, some small, this is just one example.”

BuzzFeed News found that the Department of Labor also linked to VDare in a February 2017 newsletter. Daily bulletins for EOIR, the Labor Department, ICE, HUD, and the Department of Homeland Security included links from the Western Journal and Epoch Times. Links to the New American — the magazine of the John Birch Society, a far-right group that pushed conspiracy theories that Obama wasn’t born in the US — were also in some of those newsletters.

Mains said that TechMIS uses a combination of automated systems and human editors to find stories around certain keywords that are relevant to each agency. He noted that his company was “not chartered in any way to censor the news” and had not heard of VDare until Thursday when he was asked by EOIR to no longer include the white nationalist site on digests moving forward.

“We presented the news — the entire universe of news,” he told BuzzFeed News on Friday. “Including a link did not mean there was in any way an

endorsement of anything that was in there. There was stuff from the left, far left, right, far right."

Among other publications included in the newsletters were the Washington Post, New York Times, HuffPost, the Intercept, Fox News, Breitbart News, Daily Caller, and Daily Wire. Of the fringe and conspiracy sites, the Epoch Times was by far cited the most number of times. BuzzFeed News found citations of the publication in more than 120 EOIR newsletters.

[VDare](#) [7/23/2019 11:08 PM, Staff, 24K, CT] reports in 1996, Congress passed and President Bill Clinton signed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, a significant reform, for the better, of American immigration law. Expedited Removal was a tool for arrest and removal of illegal aliens that did not provide a means for the alien to enter the Executive Office for Immigration Review, the immigration courts in the Department of Justice or arrested in the United States could be processed and removed from the United States without any review except by then Immigration and Naturalization Service enforcement personnel. The only major restriction was that illegal aliens in the United States more than two years were exempt Expedited Removal and had recourse to relief from removal in the EOIR.

[FOX News](#) [7/23/2019 12:43 PM, Joshua Nelson, 10258K] reports a Democratic senator said Tuesday that he is joining with Republicans in prioritizing the deportation of "the most violent and dangerous people in this country illegally." "We are overwhelmed at the border. It is a crisis, it's a humanitarian crisis that we gotta take some action on for sure," Sen. Doug Jones, D-Ala., told "Fox & Friends." Jones, Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., and Sen.

TechMIS / Via TechMIS

An EOIR newsletter from July 24 included this summary and link to a VDare post. The linked story includes a mention of a "zerg rush" of immigrants coming across the border.

In one VDare post sent to EOIR employees in July, a blogger wrote that the "deep state" had scuttled previous efforts to enforce fast-track deportations. The post includes a mention of a "zerg rush" of immigrants coming across the border.

"We will see if Kevin McAleenan will implement this expansion. I think not. Sabotage is his specialty," the piece concludes. The sentence links to posts about McAleenan that feature anti-trans comments about the acting DHS

secretary, describing him as a “Ladyboy DACA, #DeepState operative” and “Tranny Kirstjen Nielsen,” a derogatory reference to the recently departed Homeland secretary.

In a story posted on New American and circulated to ICE staffers earlier this month, an author references an “invasion” of immigrants at the border. “Border patrol officials have said as much for months, but House and Senate Democrats, who hope to keep illegals coming in to swell the ranks of the party, have ignored them,” the post read.

Shawn Neudauer, a spokesperson for ICE, said the agency sends the clippings to a subset of its employees. The news briefing is delivered through an email service to the employees after the agency receives the brief from the contractor. He said the agency scans the briefings, which also include links to mainstream news outlets, as a way to understand how they are being written about online.

“Most federal agencies monitor news and clipping services capture headlines from web-published stories,” he said in an email. “It says absolutely nothing about the value of the material received — only noting whatever source said whatever ‘thing’ — which happens to be fairly useful in combating false narratives about the critical work out special agents and officers do every day.”

When asked about publications including the Epoch Times, the New American, and the Western Journal, Mains said he had never heard of or read them. TechMIS, he said, had been working with government agencies since 2012, and while most newsletters are sent to agencies without review, the EOIR staff is more “hands on” than the rest.

“We’re here to react to the needs of the government,” Mains added.

In April, a VDare story about the “border asylum crisis” found its way into the EOIR newsletter. Railing on the current state of the practice of asylum in the US, it also excerpted part of another article that mentioned the “deep state” for open borders.

“Like I say, I hope somebody in the administration is reading this,” the author wrote.