

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 11, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520-0099

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

Thank you for your efforts to draw attention to, and address, the ever growing number of concerns about totalitarian activities by the People's Republic of China. We are writing to share our concerns regarding efforts by China and technology companies closely aligned with the Chinese Communist Party, to utilize international standards setting bodies, such as the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), to internationalize standards for advanced surveillance technology. The evidence from Xinjiang Province of how artificial intelligence-based technologies, such as developments in facial recognition, are used to oppress Uyghur Muslims makes clear that standards setting bodies should not be used to advance or legitimize such practices. We urge you to continue to prioritize American leadership on this issue, and build an international coalition to preserve the integrity of international standards setting bodies.

International standards setting bodies are foundational to international trade and commerce. Without them, a litany of technical and logistical barriers to trade erected by different countries – with divergence on issues as wide-ranging as food labeling, construction materials, and wireless communications standards – would balkanize our global economy. Thanks to American industry's leadership and our diplomatic resolve, the United States has consistently set the bar for international standards setting. We believe it is vital for our economy, and foreign policy, to maintain that leadership.

Unfortunately, China has indicated a willingness to use standards setting bodies in perverse ways to normalize global opinions about Orwellian surveillance technology. By shaping the debate about the legitimate uses of artificial intelligence and facial recognition, China can expand opportunities for countries, particularly those in the developing world, to adopt surveillance technology and undemocratic practices. According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Chinese companies have supplied AI-based surveillance systems to 63 countries, including 36 that are part of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

With respect to the Uyghurs, China is using technology in ways never seen before. China uses facial recognition to profile Uyghur individuals, classify them on the basis of their ethnicity, and single them out for tracking, detention, and mistreatment. The machine learning techniques used in Xinjiang Province, and throughout China, which are designed specifically, and intentionally, to classify people on the basis of physical traits harken back to troubling practices related to phrenology and eugenics. And these technologies are deployed in the service of a

dystopian vision for technology governance that harnesses the economic benefits of the internet in the absence of political freedom and sees technology companies as instruments of state power.

As you know, China is currently working to use standards setting bodies to gain the imprimatur of international legitimacy and support across a range of emerging technologies. China's censorship and surveillance technologies are the envy of autocratic regimes around the world, with China exporting both its technology and its technology governance vision to countries such as Ethiopia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Rwanda, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe. China's efforts to steer standards setting bodies towards work in service of this anti-democratic vision for technology undermines the apolitical purposes standard setting bodies serve.

At the same time, we have seen our position as a global leader on technology issues weakened by a retreat of the United States from the global stage. The United States and its allies must build international support for rules and standards that address the internet's potential for censorship and repression, presenting alternatives that explicitly embrace a free and open internet. To that end, we urge you to work closely with other countries to ensure China cannot use the ITU or other multilateral fora to advance its techno-nationalist agenda. We also ask the Department to provide an update on its engagement with the ITU to prevent ITU standards setting processes from being used to undermine human rights.

Some argue that China has an inherent advantage over the United States with respect to artificial intelligence because of China's lax privacy standards and lack of respect for human rights—we disagree. We believe privacy and human rights protections are features, not bugs, of our democracy and our culture of innovation; they make America stronger, and more likely to win any "artificial intelligence race" going forward. Ultimately, technology is shaped by the norms that guide its development. Thank you for your consideration of our views on the intersection of human rights and artificial intelligence in China, and we look forward to working with you to ensure that the American values remain part of the international conversation about artificial intelligence and facial recognition.

Sincerely,



Rob Portman
United States Senator



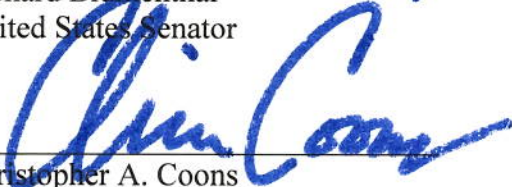
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United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Tom Cotton
United States Senator



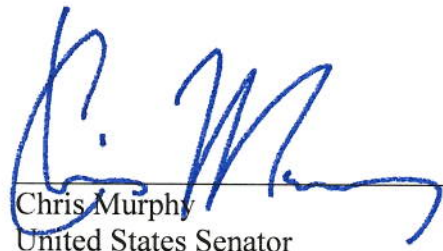
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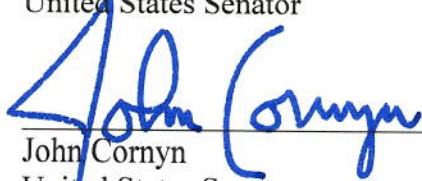
Chris Murphy
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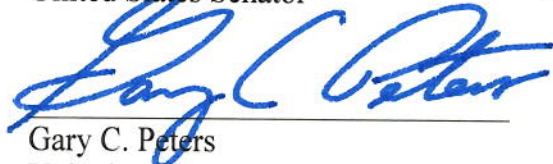
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Edward J. Markey
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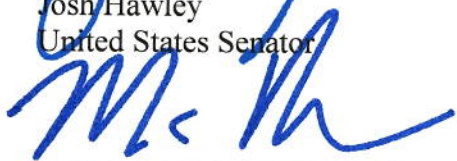
Gary C. Peters
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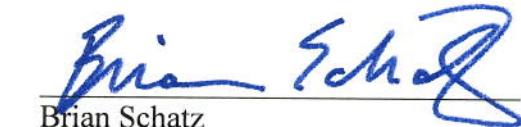
Josh Hawley
United States Senator



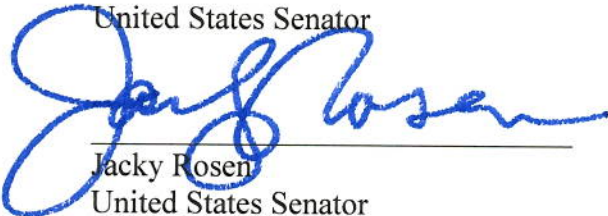
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United States Senator



Marco Rubio
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Brian Schatz
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Jacky Rosen
United States Senator