

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 19th, 2018

Mr. Gary Pruitt  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Associated Press  
200 Liberty Street  
New York, NY 10281

Dear Mr. Pruitt,

Recognizing that a free and independent press is indispensable to our democratic society, we write in response to recent news reports that the Associated Press (AP) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) deepening cooperation with China's Xinhua News Agency.<sup>1</sup> Established in 1931 as the Red China News Agency to promote the interests of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Xinhua is a state-run news agency fundamentally different in nature from traditional media outlets. It reports to, and must be assumed to receive orders from, the State Council Information Office and the CCP's Central Propaganda Department.<sup>2</sup> In sharp contrast to the AP's independent journalism, Xinhua's core mission is to shape public opinion in ways sympathetic to the CCP's legitimacy and behavior. As part of a broader geopolitical strategy, the Chinese government has increased support for Xinhua in recent years, and the organization plans to expand to 200 foreign news bureaus by 2020—a 64% increase from 2009.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the Wall Street Journal reported in late September that the U.S. Department of Justice ordered Xinhua and CGTN, another state-run media outlet that is used for the Chinese government's global propaganda arm, to register as foreign agents under the *Foreign Agent Registration Act*.<sup>4</sup>

As one report recently found, “through China's vast media censorship and Party control, Xinhua has the ability to undermine U.S. soft power and foreign policy messaging by portraying China's troubling actions as justified, thereby inaccurately influencing international and domestic audiences.”<sup>5</sup> This is not just a theoretical concern. Chen Yonglin, a Chinese diplomat who defected to Australia, has described how Xinhua reporters “have political missions; to do propaganda, using selective reporting to influence foreign politics. This includes defaming

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<sup>1</sup> Lu Hui, ed., “Xinhua, AP sign MOU to enhance cooperation,” *Xinhuanet*, November 25, 2018, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-11/25/c\\_137630583.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-11/25/c_137630583.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Emily Weinstein, “Covert Coverage: Xinhua as an Agent of Influence in the United States,” *Project 2049 Institute*, March 7, 2018, <https://project2049.net/2018/03/07/covert-coverage-xinhua-as-an-agent-of-influence-in-the-united-states/>.

<sup>3</sup> “China is spending billions to make the world love it,” *The Economist*, March 23, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/china/2017/03/23/china-is-spending-billions-to-make-the-world-love-it>.

<sup>4</sup> Kate O’Keeffe and Aruna Viswanatha, “Justice Department Has Ordered Key Chinese State Media Firms to Register as Foreign Agents,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 18, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/justice-department-has-ordered-key-chinese-state-media-firms-to-register-as-foreign-agents-1537296756>.

<sup>5</sup> Weinstein, “Covert Coverage.”

western countries in order to make the CCP look good.”<sup>6</sup> For instance, in 2011, Xinhua began leasing a 60-foot LED sign in Times Square to display CCP propaganda, including one message it played 120 times a day for two weeks proclaiming the PRC’s “indisputable sovereignty” over the South China Sea.”<sup>7</sup>

Even more troubling is Xinhua’s relationship with Chinese intelligence services. Xinhua regularly produces secret documents widely distributed throughout the CCP which are functionally similar to daily intelligence briefings. The reports “provide the top CCP leadership with the most relevant information on China collected by Xinhua reporters both domestically and internationally.”<sup>8</sup> This type of behavior has led the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission to find that “Xinhua serves some of the functions of an intelligence agency by gathering information and producing classified reports for the Chinese leadership on both domestic and international events.”<sup>9</sup>

When traditional media organizations treat state-run propaganda outlets like Xinhua as legitimate partners, it raises important questions. Such arrangements may boost the reach of outlets like Xinhua and open the door to propaganda unwittingly coloring domestic reporting, particularly with respect to coverage of China and its activities. These arrangements can also raise important questions about the ability of organizations that may now have financial ties with the Chinese government to report independently on its activities. Given the importance of a free and independent press to all Americans, we respectfully request the answers to the following questions:

- Will the AP release both the English and Chinese language text of its MOU with Xinhua? If you are legally restricted from releasing the actual text of the memorandum, please describe its content to the fullest degree possible.
- One Xinhua story about the MOU quoted you as saying that you looked forward to exploring additional cooperation with Xinhua.<sup>10</sup> What further cooperation do you envision?
- What kind of institutional protocols will be put in place to guard against Xinhua influencing the AP’s reporting?
- What level of access, if any, will Xinhua staff have to sensitive information that may be in the AP’s possession?

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<sup>6</sup> Robin Cleveland, et al., “2017 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission,” *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, November 2017, 475, [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Annual\\_Report/Chapters/Chapter%203%2C%20Section%205%20-%20China%27s%20Domestic%20Information%20Controls%2C%20Global%20Media%20Influence%2C%20and%20Cyber%20Diplomacy\\_0.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Annual_Report/Chapters/Chapter%203%2C%20Section%205%20-%20China%27s%20Domestic%20Information%20Controls%2C%20Global%20Media%20Influence%2C%20and%20Cyber%20Diplomacy_0.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Cleveland et al., “2017 Report to Congress,” 477; “China is spending,” *The Economist*.

<sup>8</sup> Weinstein, “Covert Coverage.”

<sup>9</sup> Cleveland et al., “2017 Report to Congress,” 475.

<sup>10</sup> Lu Hui, ed., “Xinhua, AP sign MOU to enhance cooperation,”

We appreciate your prompt reply, including any views you may have about the state of the freedom of the press in the People's Republic of China and the overall compatibility of Xinhua's and the Associated Press' respective missions.

Sincerely,



Mike Gallagher  
Member of Congress



Brad Sherman  
Member of Congress



Tom Cotton  
U.S. Senator



Mark Warner  
U.S. Senator



Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator



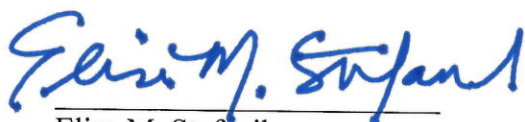
Marcy Kaptur  
Member of Congress



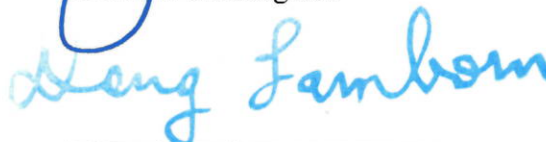
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Member of Congress



Jackie Speier  
Member of Congress



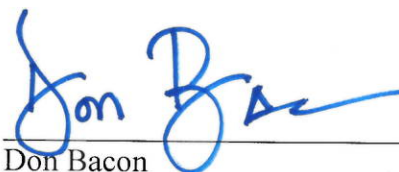
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Member of Congress




Doug Lamborn  
Member of Congress

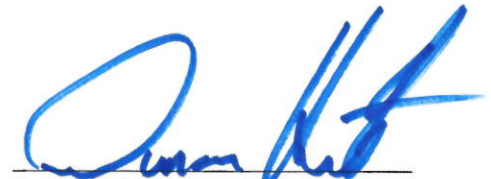


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