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October 16, 2019

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 25000

Dear Mr. President,

We write to express our deep concern that you urged Chinese government officials to conduct an investigation into a potential political rival. This invitation to a foreign government to interfere in the American electoral process not only violates your oath of office, but also undermines the very values for which this country stands.

In remarks to reporters at the White House on October 3, 2019, you stated that “China should start an investigation into the Bidens because what happened in China is just about as bad as what happened with Ukraine” — an apparent reference to false allegations leveled against Hunter Biden arising out of his business affiliations.¹ In making these comments, you lent credence to unsubstantiated claims where there has been no law enforcement or judicial action, and gave the leader of the Chinese Communist Party your tacit approval to insert itself into the 2020 presidential election. This amounts to an abuse of power.

From the beginning of the Republic, our founding fathers feared the intrusion of foreign powers into American democracy. In 1787, John Adams wrote, “[a]s often as elections happen, the danger of foreign influence recurs.”² And the following year, Alexander Hamilton warned us that foreign powers trying to gain influence in our politics would be “[the] most deadly adversaries of Republican government.”³ Such warnings are just as relevant today as they were in our nation’s earliest days.

¹ Kevin Liptak, *Trump now says both China and Ukraine should investigate Bidens*, CNN (Oct. 3, 2019), <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/03/politics/donald-trump-ukraine-china-investigate-2020/index.html>.

² “To Thomas Jefferson from John Adams, 6 December 1787,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed October 15, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-12-02-0405>. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 12, 7 August 1787–31 March 1788, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955, pp. 396–397.]

³ Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist Papers*: No. 68, The Avalon Project, accessed October 15, 2019, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed68.asp.

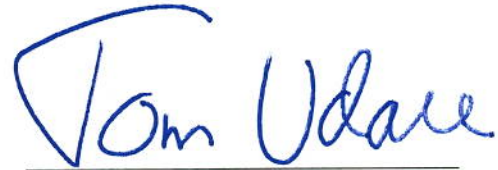
Numerous U.S. government officials have already warned that foreign government entities, including the Chinese Communist Party, seek to influence the outcome of the 2020 presidential election. For example, on January 29, 2019, then-Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats stated that foreign actors will interfere in our elections “as an opportunity to advance their interests” and will “refine their capabilities and add new tactics as they learn from each other’s experiences and efforts in previous elections.”⁴ This warning followed remarks by Vice President Mike Pence, when he stated, “China has initiated an unprecedented effort to influence American public opinion, the 2018 elections, and the environment leading into the 2020 presidential elections.”⁵ As these statements demonstrate, the challenge of protecting our sovereign democratic process is not a partisan one.


It is concerning enough that a sitting President would invite interference from any foreign entity, but it is especially troubling when the request is made of a government actively undermining freedoms and rights around the world. It is plausible that Chinese President Xi Jinping would interpret your invitation as an opening to further threaten fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly, and the press, whether in Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, or beyond, especially as media reports state that you told President Xi that you would remain silent on pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong.⁶

We believe that — consistent with your oath of office — the President of the United States must protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. At a minimum, that includes ensuring the sanctity of our electoral process and not inviting foreign interference into it.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Tom Udall
United States Senator


Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

⁴ Martin Matishak, *Intelligence heads warn of more aggressive election meddling in 2020*, Politico (Jan. 29, 2019), <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/01/29/dan-coats-2020-election-foreign-interference-1126077>.

⁵ Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration’s Policy Toward China, Oct. 4, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>.

⁶ Jim Sciutto, Gloria Borger, and Jeremy Diamond, *Trump promised Xi US silence on Hong Kong democracy protests as trade talks stalled*, CNN (Oct. 4, 2019), <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/04/politics/trump-xi-hong-kong-protests/index.html>.