

JIM BANKS
THIRD DISTRICT, INDIANA



COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE
STRATEGIC COMPETITION
BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE
CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1403

February 22, 2024

The Hon. Merrick Garland
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20530

Attorney General Garland:

I am writing to urge you to investigate the U.S. Heartland China Association (USHCA) for apparent violations of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), as revealed in a recent report from the Daily Caller News Foundation (DCNF).

According to the DCNF's reporting, at least four senior officials at USHCA have worked with United Front Work Department (UFWD) proxies. These proxies include the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, the Western Returned Scholars Association, a Beijing-based think tank called the Center for China and Globalization, and the China-United States Exchange Foundation, which is a FARA-registered group. Per the reporting, one of these senior USHCA officials, a strategic advisor named Zhao Suisheng, has worked directly for China's government in a variety of advisory positions.

The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) UFWD relies on covert operations and ambiguity. The UFWD conceals its influence over groups like the USHCA through its use of proxy groups. As part of its subnational influence strategy, the CCP, through its UFWD proxies, builds relationships with unsuspecting local and state officials, often under the guise of cultural and economic exchange, with the goal of manipulating these officials to serve the CCP's interests. As former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo explained to me at a recent hearing hosted by the Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party: "They may show up and give you some temporary lift, but in the end, it is about them, not us... This is an effort at every level for the Chinese Communist Party to have the capacity to influence our government."

For example, one UFWD-proxy and official partner to the USHCA, the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), invited a USHCA-sponsored mayoral delegation on a trip to China in October 2023. During the trip, the former Mayor of


Carmel, Indiana, Jim Brainard, who also serves as vice chair of USHCA, ratified a sister-city agreement with Xiangyang, Hubei. CPAFFC is the UFWD proxy responsible for managing and expanding sister relationships between the US and China. The new Mayor of Carmel, Sue Finkam, admirably cut all ties with the USHCA in early February. When asked about her decision, Mayor Finkam told a local newspaper that, “the Chinese Communist Party will have no influence over the City of Carmel.”

FARA requires all U.S. residents acting as agents of foreign government to regularly file public disclosures with the Justice Department (DOJ) outlining their activities and describing their status as a foreign agent. Congress enacted FARA to help the DOJ monitor foreign principals’ activities within the U.S. and to guide private citizens’ decision-making when dealing with foreign agents by providing public transparency.

The USHCA acts in concert with the United Front to expand CCP influence within Indiana and the Midwest. USHCA is not an independent entity—it is a malign agent of our foremost foreign adversary.

Thank you for considering this urgent national security matter. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Banks". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jim Banks
Member of Congress