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U.S. Department of State Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs
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Chairman Portman, Ranking Member Carper, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today to discuss the State Department's public diplomacy efforts in China. American public diplomacy expands and strengthens the relationship between the people and government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world and, in so doing, it advances our ability to achieve U.S. foreign policy goals. The Department's definition of public diplomacy generally includes both policy-related messaging as well as the facilitation of professional, cultural, and educational exchanges. Among other things, the work of public diplomacy includes activities such as implementing the Fulbright program, introducing future leaders to the United States through the International Visitor Leadership Program, or bringing together foreign opinion leaders with their American counterparts.

In China, we carry out a range of public diplomacy activities in spite of a challenging environment. Our six diplomatic posts in China—comprising the U.S. Embassy in Beijing and U.S. consulates in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Wuhan—have a total of approximately 110 staff (including Chinese-speaking American diplomats and local Chinese employees) and a budget of \$31 million in FY 2018 to support public diplomacy (approximately \$8 million in public diplomacy funds from the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs and an additional \$23 million from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Exchange). This staff is the backbone of our efforts.

By and large, Chinese citizens welcome U.S. public diplomacy in the limited areas where they are allowed access to it. They are eager to participate in the programs offered by the U.S. government and to better understand the United States and its people. There is no better evidence of this than the large number of Chinese young people choosing to study in the United States. Students from China, now numbering more than 360,000, make up the largest contingent of international students at American higher education institutions. Chinese parents continue to spend their life savings to send their sons and daughters to study in the United States.

While the State Department conducts many public diplomacy programs in China, the Chinese government has increasingly impeded U.S. access to some segments of Chinese society, including in academic settings. Periodic blocking of official meetings and U.S. government-sponsored programs has been a reality in China for decades. However, in recent years, obstruction by Chinese authorities has increased in line with a more repressive academic environment in China. Typical obstacles include refusals of visits by U.S. diplomats to campuses, difficulties for American academics in obtaining visas, and greater obstruction in the program activities of U.S. government-funded American Cultural Centers, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this statement.

Official Chinese institutions, including universities and government departments, have a Foreign Affairs Office, an internal governmental office responsible for managing contact

between all non-Chinese entities and the institution. Chinese institutions that wish to interact with foreign government personnel must obtain approval from this office. As such, these Foreign Affairs Offices essentially function as gate-keepers, controlling foreigners' access to Chinese institutions.

In most countries around the world, an American ambassador would be welcomed on a university campus, usually with quite a bit of fanfare. The story is quite different in China. While Chinese professors and students might seek to engage with foreign diplomats, Chinese authorities often make such engagements difficult. To give a recent example, this past November, U.S. Ambassador to China Terry Branstad was scheduled to speak to a group of Chinese professors who had spent time in the United States as Fulbright scholars. The lecture was to take place at Nankai University in the city of Tianjin. The Foreign Affairs Office at the university initially granted permission, but later the office cancelled the event without an adequate explanation just two days before the visit. This is just one of many cases of unexplained and sudden cancellations experienced by U.S. diplomats attempting to visit universities.

University campuses are not the only places where engagements between U.S. diplomats and Chinese citizens are blocked. Earlier last year, a group of about 30 students was scheduled to visit the U.S. Consulate General in Guangzhou to attend a lecture on U.S.-China relations. Although the students originally did not have any classes scheduled the afternoon of the lecture, the school suddenly re-arranged the class schedule and directed the students not to visit the consulate.

The State Department takes notice when incidents like these take place. From January 2016 to April 2017, there were more than 150 instances involving denial of permission to meet an official, cancellation of an event with a partner organization, withdrawal of a Chinese participant from a U.S. government-funded exchange program, or intimidation of a Chinese citizen who had contact with U.S. embassy or consulate personnel. The control exerted by Chinese authorities and their pressure on organizations such as universities are at the heart of the problem. Chinese universities or scholars who would like to engage with U.S. diplomats are often prevented from doing so either by their Foreign Affairs Offices or by security authorities. When meetings do take place, we understand that Chinese authorities require participants to submit detailed reports of the conversations. We view these tactics as intimidation, which pressures our interlocutors to be cautious, refusing or limiting interaction with U.S. diplomats. As a result, U.S. diplomats' ability to engage with ordinary Chinese people is stifled. In contrast, we note that the Chinese Ambassador to the United States and Chinese diplomatic staff regularly address U.S. audiences, including on university campuses, free from obstruction by the U.S. government. We continually convey to the Chinese government that we expect reciprocal access for U.S. diplomats and programs in China and continue to examine other options that might be available.

Despite the obstacles, American diplomats continue to meet and engage with a broad cross-section of the Chinese population through a variety of programs, both in U.S. diplomatic facilities and outside them. As the Subcommittee is aware, however, the State Department's public diplomacy efforts are not limited only to direct engagement by U.S. government

personnel. The Department also supports American organizations, including universities and colleges, in forging ties with their counterparts in foreign countries.

A prime example is the American Cultural Center (ACC) grant program started in 2010 specifically for China. The ACC program provided seed funding to 29 U.S. universities to partner with Chinese universities to establish American Cultural Centers. (Note: The American Cultural Center program in China is distinct from the State Department's global network of American Spaces.) Some of the American Cultural Centers have a physical location at a Chinese university that serves as a venue for regular programs about U.S. culture, society, values, and history. Some partnerships do not have a permanent physical space and instead schedule activities at different campus venues throughout the academic year on U.S.-related topics. The U.S. Embassy in Beijing awarded grants ranging from \$10,000 to a maximum of \$100,000 to U.S. universities that applied for the grants as part of an open competition. As part of the grant application, American universities were asked to identify a Chinese university to partner with and to submit a letter of commitment from that university to jointly run an American Cultural Center.

The establishment of American Cultural Centers was meant to facilitate long-term relationships between U.S. and Chinese educational institutions. While some ACC efforts were stymied right at the beginning, a number of ACCs were successful in promoting understanding between Americans and Chinese. However, beginning in 2014, Chinese authorities started unduly restricting the activities of American Cultural Centers. In 2015 and 2016, severe restrictions came into effect and some of the ACCs were forced to close down. These excessive restrictions on U.S. efforts stand in stark contrast to the ability of Confucius Institutes to operate free from government obstruction in the United States.

In recent years, many of the Chinese universities hosting American Cultural Centers on their campuses told U.S. diplomats that they were not welcome to even visit the Centers. Such site visits are an essential part of the monitoring required of U.S. government-funded projects, helping U.S. officials ensure that federal funds are being properly used. However, restrictions by Chinese authorities made it so difficult for U.S. personnel to visit certain American Cultural Centers that the only channel remaining for examining ongoing activities, or the lack thereof, were written grant reports submitted by the U.S. institutions.

In 2017, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing decided to discontinue funding for the ACC program due to the difficulty in ensuring that the American Cultural Centers remained effective tools for reaching Chinese students with information about U.S. culture, society, values, and history. This decision was solidified in a recommendation by the Department's Office of Inspector General. The U.S. Embassy in Beijing officially ceased providing new funding for American Cultural Centers in 2018. There are currently three remaining U.S. universities conducting previously funded ACC-related activities that will conclude by the summer of 2019.

Between 2010 and 2018, a total of approximately \$5 million in public diplomacy funding was awarded to U.S. universities as part of the American Cultural Center program. Although the program had many successes, especially in the earlier years, the increasing restrictions by Chinese authorities made the continuation of the program impossible.

The U.S. Embassy in Beijing still offers grant funding totaling \$1.5 million annually to support programs that introduce Chinese audiences to U.S. culture and values and that support the development of a more robust civil society in China. Because of these grants, the Department is able to ensure that target audiences are reached through partner organizations.

American diplomats in China also continue to use American Spaces, namely American Centers at U.S. diplomatic facilities, to engage with key Chinese audiences. The Beijing American Center, for instance, sits on the diplomatic compound of the U.S. Embassy in Beijing and draws an average of nearly 2,000 Chinese citizens each month to attend talks on dozens of policy-related topics, ranging from the global opioid crisis to human rights. Similar spaces at U.S. diplomatic facilities in Chengdu, Guangzhou, and Shanghai draw in sizeable audiences on a weekly basis. Offering programs on U.S. diplomatic compounds largely eliminates the risk of unexplained last-minute cancellations. It also allows our diplomats to convey more direct messages than they could in other venues in China. While Chinese citizens are sometimes blocked from entering our premises, they continue to find ways to attend programs.

Educational and cultural exchanges are a key part of the public diplomacy portfolio in China. We find that exchange programs can have a long-term effect on an individual and his or her community. Among other exchange programs, the State Department funds and administers the Fulbright program worldwide, and in China nearly 200 American and Chinese citizens participate each year. The Fulbright program continues to be seen as prestigious by the Chinese academic community and is in part funded by the Chinese Ministry of Education. However, Chinese authorities have prevented Chinese alumni of the Fulbright program from forming a Fulbright Association, which is standard practice in other countries.

The International Visitor Leadership Program is another prestigious program that brings between 120 and 150 rising leaders from across China to the United States each year for three-week study tours in various fields. Unlike in other countries, in China, authorities force an average of 20 percent of the candidates to withdraw their participation at the last minute. Although those candidates are replaced by alternate candidates who are also highly qualified, it is yet another avenue through which the Chinese government limits who can have access to information about the United States.

When not impeded, such exchange programs engage the next generation of China's leaders and opinion makers in important sectors. We also work to reach the Chinese public on a much larger scale through a variety of media. Our diplomatic posts deliver tailored messages about U.S. policy, culture, and values through traditional media and social media. In particular, the Department maintains a robust social media presence through its six diplomatic posts in China. We recognize the importance of reaching beyond Chinese state-controlled media to connect with ordinary citizens.

There are more than one billion social media users in China, most of them accessing the Internet on mobile devices. We deliver messages from the United States government directly to Chinese citizens, largely through their smartphones. By remaining flexible, adaptable, and well-resourced in terms of funding, training, and staffing, the Department maintains a dialogue with

China's citizens about our values, policies, and priorities, largely through social media platforms that are nearly exclusively used in China such as Weibo and WeChat.

The U.S. Embassy in Beijing operates the most-followed Weibo account among foreign diplomatic missions in China, reaching more than 2.5 million followers daily. Across different social media platforms, messages from the U.S. diplomatic presence in China reach on average more than 3.5 million Chinese citizens each day. Perhaps even more noteworthy than high viewership, we have high engagement from the Chinese public online. Our social media postings receive thousands of likes, comments, and shares each day, showing the Chinese public's eagerness to engage in discussion about U.S.-related topics.

Even with this success, the U.S. Embassy and consulates experience several instances of censorship from the Chinese government each week. Forms of censorship include: disabling share and comment functions on postings; blocking links shared in postings; preventing content from being uploaded to a platform; and deleting content after it has been uploaded and viewed. In one recent example, two out of the three videos posted in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and China featuring Henry Kissinger were blocked on the popular messaging service WeChat. This censorship stands in stark contrast to the unhindered use of social media enjoyed by the Embassy of China in Washington D.C., which launched its Facebook page over a year ago. The Embassy of China stated the goal of its presence on Facebook is "to open new flows of communication and serve as a bridge for deepening friendship between the Chinese and American people." We laud this effort and continually convey to the Chinese government that the United States expects reciprocity in social media use by the U.S. Embassy and consulates in China.

The Department welcomes the Subcommittee's inquiry into questions of reciprocity regarding U.S. and Chinese public diplomacy efforts. As noted in the PSI report, the Department's public diplomacy efforts in China have experienced excessive restrictions in various forms, whether through censorship of U.S. Embassy social media efforts or blocking American diplomats' access to Chinese university campuses. The deterioration in access to audiences and spaces is undeniable. This presents a challenge, but not an insurmountable one. The State Department continues to work towards reaching ordinary Chinese citizens, in facilitating dialogue between our peoples, and in promoting American values.

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I look forward to answering your questions and those of other members of the Subcommittee.