

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
FOREIGN RELATIONS
SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE
SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

January 30, 2024

Ms. Wendy McMahon
President and CEO
CBS News and Stations
524 West 57th Street
New York, NY 10019

Dear Ms. McMahon:

I write with regard to a recent CBS News story on the “rebranding” of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), where your employees visited, and a region where the United States and other nations have determined genocide is being committed against predominately Muslim Uyghurs and other ethnic groups. In participating in this Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propaganda trip, your organization may have violated U.S. sanctions and/or supported the evasion of such sanctions by a designated entity. As such, your company owes answers to its viewers, and the American people, as to why you would allow your journalists to partake in the CCP’s attempt to cover up its genocide against the Uyghurs.

As you know, the United States government, under both the current and previous administration, has determined that the People’s Republic of China, under the direction and control of the CCP, is committing crimes against humanity and genocide against the predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious groups in Xinjiang. The U.S. Department of Treasury has sanctioned the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), and the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau (XPSB) for serious human rights abuses against ethnic groups in the XUAR. As such, it is unlawful for any U.S. person or company to enter into transactions with either XPCC or XPSB, including “making of any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services by, to, or for the benefit of any blocked person or the receipt of any contribution or provision of funds, goods or services from any such person.”

On January 7, 2024, CBS News published a story, “the rebranding of Xinjiang,” written by Elizabeth Palmer and produced by Randy Schmidt. Despite ostensibly seeking to provide a balanced perspective of life in Xinjiang, the story is filled with gratuitous pictures of formerly Uyghur cities it describes as “Disneyfied” rather than “ethnically cleansed” which would be factually accurate. I am further dismayed that while the article discloses the trip was made possible by the “Chinese Information Office,” it fails to note that this is the external name of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. This egregious reporting fails to expose the reality of what is happening in Xinjiang and will instead be used by the Chinese Communist Party to continue to cover up their crimes.

In addition to being puppets of the CCP, there is also the question as to whether this trip was carried out in violation of U.S. sanctions or assisted in the evasion of sanctions by the XPCC or XPSB.

According to the article, CBS News joined a tour arranged by the Central Propaganda Department, who “hired the buses, set the itinerary, and provided the translators and the staff who have accompanied us every step of the way” and that CBS visited “agricultural machinery to ancient ruins, to e-sales of local plums on TikTok.” The so-called “extremist museum” described in the article also appears to be the exhibit “against terrorism and extremism” at the Xinjiang Museum in Urumqi, operated by the XPCC, while the Id Kah Mosque described in the article is managed by the XPCC. Even if CBS News, or its employees, did not directly pay the XPCC for these visits or services, U.S. sanctions prohibits the “receipt of funds, goods, or services” from a designated entity. Even if the Central Propaganda Department used an undesignated entity established by the Chinese government to avoid U.S. sanctions, then this would be considered sanctions evasion on behalf of a designated entity.

It is nearly impossible to operate in this region without working in conjunction with the XPCC, which functions like a parallel government and oversees economic development and resource extraction in Xinjiang, including agriculture and tourism. As such, I request answers to the following questions.

1. Under what terms did the CCP allow CBS News to film, interview local residents, and cover logistics and other expenses?
2. Was CBS News aware of the China Information Office’s role as the Central Propaganda Department of the CCP before accepting the invitation to travel to Xinjiang?
3. Did CBS News or its employees, before, during or after in Xinjiang, receive any goods or services from the US-sanctioned XPCC or any security or related services for the trip from the US-sanctioned XPSB?
4. Did CBS News, or its employees, apply for, and receive, a license from the Treasury Department to undertake activity prohibited by sanctions on XPCC? If so, please explain.
5. Did CBS News employees purchase products or goods from XPCC-controlled companies or any other company in Xinjiang? If so, did these products or goods come into the United States?

The world has the right to know what the CCP is undertaking in Xinjiang. There are brave Uyghur, Kazakh and Kyrgyz reporters, many of whose families face official repercussions in Xinjiang, working to reveal the atrocities committed against their peoples by the CCP. CBS News had the opportunity to work in cooperation with these journalists and improve the world’s understanding of this part of the world. Instead, CBS News chose to work with the Propaganda Department of a genocidal political party by publishing a puff piece that does more to obscure the truth rather than expose it and could have been in violation of U.S. sanctions in the process.

I look forward to your reply on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator