

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 12, 2018

COMMITTEES:

APPROPRIATIONS

FOREIGN RELATIONS

SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

I write regarding the growing foreign influence operations of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the United States, particularly in our academic institutions. There is mounting concern, as articulated by senior intelligence officials at a recent Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on "Worldwide Threats," about the Chinese government's increasingly aggressive attempts to use "Confucius Institutes" and other means to influence foreign academic institutions and critical analysis of China's past history and present policies. The upcoming *Higher Education Reauthorization Act* provides an opportunity to begin to address some of these concerns.

Confucius Institutes are Chinese government-run programs that use the teaching of Chinese language and culture as a tool to expand the political influence of the PRC. These institutes are overseen by a branch of the Chinese Ministry of Education, and are instructed to only teach versions of Chinese history, culture or current events that are explicitly approved by the Chinese Government and Communist Party. As the American Association of University Professors noted in a June 2014 report: "*Confucius Institutes function as an arm of the Chinese state and are allowed to ignore academic freedom. Their academic activities are under the supervision of Hanban, a Chinese state agency which is chaired by a member of the Politburo and the vice-premier of the People's Republic of China. Most agreements establishing Confucius Institutes feature nondisclosure clauses and unacceptable concessions to the political aims and practices of the government of China. Specifically, North American universities permit Confucius Institutes to advance a state agenda in the recruitment and control of academic staff, in the choice of curriculum, and in the restriction of debate.*"<sup>1</sup>

There are presently more than 100 Confucius Institutes, in addition to Confucius Classrooms at the K-12 level in the United States, including several in the state of Florida. Enclosed please find a copy of a letter I recently sent to the heads of several Florida academic

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institutions, along with their respective board of trustees, urging that they terminate their agreements with Chinese government-run Confucius Institutes. As noted in the enclosed letter, some American colleges and universities have already taken this step, while others, even now, are reconsidering their relationship with the Chinese government. Even as these discussions are taking place in the academic context, I believe it is incumbent upon the federal government to bring greater transparency to bare on any foreign funding, Chinese or otherwise, of American academic institutions and in the case of the Confucius Institutes to press schools to choose between federal monies for taxpayer monies for foreign studies programs and Confucius Institute funding, which comes with clear strings attached and in many cases any agenda that is antithetical to principles of free expression and inquiry.

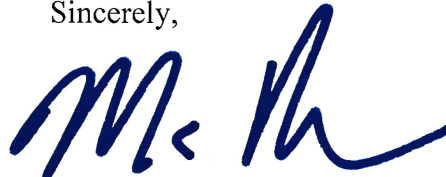
As such, I respectfully urge you to include language in the soon to be introduced Higher Education Reauthorization Act lowering the threshold for disclosing gifts to colleges and universities from foreign donors, as well as requiring that the fair market value of in-kind gifts and services from foreign donors count toward the total that colleges and universities disclose. Currently, Title I of the Higher Education Act requires colleges and universities to report to the Secretary of Education gifts of \$250,000 or more in a calendar year from a foreign institution or person. But gifts of much smaller amounts represent major portions of college budgets, especially in humanities programs. According to data from the *Chronicle of Higher Education*,<sup>ii</sup> \$250,000 could fund the salaries of four full-time associate professors at an average four-year public university. I recommend that the threshold be lowered to \$50,000, enough to hire a full-time instructor at such an institution. Confucius Institutes frequently come with \$100,000-\$150,000 per year and a long list of in-kind gifts such as textbooks and teachers paid for by China. Research by the National Association of Scholars showed that since 2010, only 16 of the approximately 105 American institutions with Confucius Institutes disclosed such gifts to the Secretary of Education.<sup>iii</sup> It is in the interest of national security and institutional integrity to have information on potentially compromising gifts from foreign governments and agents of foreign governments.

I also urge you to require colleges and universities to choose between federal funding and Confucius Institute-related funding from the Chinese government. Title VI of the Higher Education provides federal grants for foreign studies programs. When a college or university accepts a Confucius Institute, it should become ineligible for a proportional amount of federal funding. Currently, the Chinese government is conducting soft power initiatives on college campuses by way of Confucius Institutes. Conditioning a portion of federal money on the closure of a Confucius Institute is an important step toward limiting China's pernicious influence on college campuses.

I look forward to working with you and your staff on these important issues. Given China's aggressive campaign to stifle free inquiry and subvert free expression both at home and

abroad, I respectfully urge your consideration of these proposals. Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.aaup.org/report/confucius-institutes>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://data.chronicle.com/category/sector/2/faculty-salaries/>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://thehill.com/opinion/education/375092-get-chinas-pernicious-confucius-institutes-out-of-us-colleges>