

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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

February 5, 2018

President Martha D. Saunders  
University of West Florida  
Office of the President  
Building 10, Room 225  
11000 University Parkway  
Pensacola, FL 32514

Dear President Saunders:

I write with regards to 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 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. Additionally, the PRC continues its efforts to interfere in multilateral institutions, threaten and intimidate rights defenders and their families, and impose censorship mechanisms on foreign publishers and social media companies. For reasons outlined below, I respectfully urge you to consider terminating your Confucius Institute agreement.

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. In November 2011, Li Changchun, a former member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, the highest body of the Chinese Communist Party, stated in a speech at the Beijing Headquarters of the Confucius Institute:

*"The Confucius Institute is an appealing brand for extending our culture abroad. It has made an important contribution toward improving our soft power. The 'Confucius' brand has a natural attractiveness. Using the excuse of teaching Chinese language, everything looks reasonable and logical."*

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. 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>

Moreover, Confucius Institute instructors are almost always hired in China and trained by the Chinese Ministry of Education without any of the same employment and hiring protections that exist in the United States. Much more difficult to measure but no less insidious, however, is the self-censorship that often takes place in academic settings where there is a Chinese government presence in the form of a Confucius Institute. University of Chicago professor Marshall Sahlins has called Confucius Institutes "academic malware" because they represent and reflect decidedly illiberal views of education and academic freedom. We know from multiple reports that topics, such as the status of Tibet and Taiwan, the fourth of June 1989 at Tiananmen Square, Falun Gong, and universal human rights, are off-limits at these institutes.

In a 2017 report titled, "Outsourced to China: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Higher Education," the National Association of Scholars found that "to a large extent, universities have made improper concessions that jeopardize academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Sometimes these concessions are official and in writing; more often they operate as implicit policies."<sup>2</sup> In turn, a growing number of universities have already cut ties with Confucius Institutes:

- In 2014, the University of Chicago suspended negotiations to renew its agreement to host a Confucius Institute following a petition signed by more than 100 faculty members raising concerns.
- Days later, Pennsylvania State University cut ties with its Confucius Institute, noting: "Several of our goals are not consistent with those of the Office of Chinese Languages Council International, known as the Hanban, which provides support to Confucius Institutes throughout the world."<sup>3</sup>
- Ontario's McMaster University shuttered its Confucius Institute in 2013 after a former instructor alleged that the university was "giving legitimization to discrimination" because her contract with Hanban prohibited her participation in Falun Gong.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, as *Politico* reported in "How China Infiltrated U.S. Classrooms" (January 16, 2018): "The American Association of University Professors, America's leading professorial guild, also recommended in 2014 that 'universities cease their involvement in Confucius Institutes unless the agreement between the university and Hanban is renegotiated,' so that the universities have unilateral control over the curriculum and faculty, Confucius faculty have the same rights of free

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aaup.org/report/confucius-institutes>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.nas.org/projects/confucius\\_institutes](https://www.nas.org/projects/confucius_institutes)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/penn-state-latest-school-to-drop-chinas-confucius-institute-1412196655>

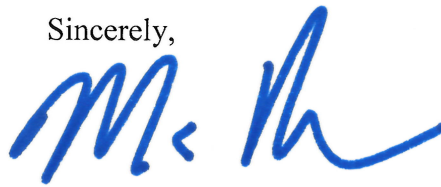
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/mcmaster-closing-confucius-institute-over-hiring-issues/article8372894/>

inquiry as their fellow teachers, and contracts between Hanban and the partner universities are made public.”

I remain deeply concerned by the proliferation of Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms in the United States. Given China’s aggressive campaign to “infiltrate” American classrooms, stifle free inquiry, and subvert free expression both at home and abroad, I respectfully urge you to consider terminating your Confucius Institute agreement. Should you have any questions or concerns please do hesitate to contact my office for further discussion.

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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