

August 29th, 2022

Jeffrey Wichman
Election Threat Executive
Foreign Malign Influence Response Center
Office of the Director of National Intelligence
Washington, DC 20511
1201 New York Avenue NW, Suite 500
Washington DC

Dear Mr. Wichman,

Last week, TikTok announced the creation of a new “Elections Center.” According to TikTok’s own press release, the center seeks to connect voters to “authoritative” information and counter “misinformation.” It would also help users register to vote via the TikTok platform.¹ This means that TikTok will have voting profiles on American users who use the Elections Center. TikTok, an overseas subsidiary of Chinese company ByteDance, which has members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on its board,² will be policing American political discourse and owning the data of potentially millions of voters.³ This new Elections Center could provide an unprecedented political surveillance and election interference tool for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), our foremost foreign adversary.

TikTok has repeatedly claimed that it would keep U.S. user data safe. But China’s national security and data security laws apply extraterritorially to all Chinese companies and their subsidiaries, which means that ByteDance and its subsidiary TikTok must provide the Chinese government with any of its data upon request.

In the past weeks, a number of reports have pushed to the fore the threat that TikTok poses to US national security. In June, *Buzzfeed* exposed that US user data collected by TikTok have been accessed from mainland China despite TikTok’s assurance otherwise.⁴ A few days ago, the *New York Times* reported that TikTok’s custom in-app browser might collect sensitive user data, such as login credentials on external websites, by monitoring users’ keystrokes.⁵ *Forbes* also reported recently that some three hundred current employees at TikTok and its parent company ByteDance previously worked for Chinese state media and some still do, based on public employee LinkedIn profiles.⁶

Brendan Carr, a commissioner on the Federal Communications Commission, has recognized TikTok as a “sophisticated surveillance tool that harvests extensive amounts of personal and sensitive data” and called on Apple and Google executives to remove TikTok from the Google

¹ <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/our-commitment-to-election-integrity>

² <https://prosperousamerica.org/ccp-takes-board-seat-at-bytedance-time-to-ban-tiktok/>

³ <https://thefederalist.com/2022/08/23/tiktoks-new-elections-center-is-a-massive-threat-to-national-security/>

⁴ <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/emilybakerwhite/tiktok-tapes-us-user-data-china-bytedance-access>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/19/technology/tiktok-browser-tracking.html>

⁶ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilybaker-white/2022/08/10/bytedance-tiktok-china-state-media-propaganda/?sh=2c4ca32c322f>

Play Store and the Apple App Store.⁷ In addition, the House of Representatives' Chief Administrative Officer Catherine Szpindor issued an advisory last week discouraging the use of TikTok, describing the application as "high risk" and noting that it could jeopardize users' privacy.⁸

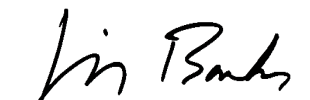
As TikTok is becoming the most popular social media platform in the United States, the Chinese government also intensified its influence efforts in the United States. According solely to disclosed data in foreign agent filings, the Chinese government's foreign agent spending in the US has increased massively from \$10 million in 2016 to \$64 million in 2020.⁹ According to an Intelligence Community Assessment released by the Director of National Intelligence, "China probably continued longstanding efforts to gather information on American voters and public opinion, political parties, candidates and their staffs and senior government officials" during the last election.

Considering the heightened risks and threat posed by China's influence operations, we would like to request that you brief Republican Study Committee members on the following topics:


- (1) The pathways TikTok's Elections Center may provide for the Chinese government and the CCP to interfere in U.S. elections.
- (2) The threats posed by TikTok's Elections Center related to surveillance efforts by the Chinese government and the CCP.
- (3) What the Director of National Intelligence is doing to protect U.S. election integrity from possible interference and surveillance by the Chinese government and the CCP.

We would appreciate your attention and information.

Sincerely,



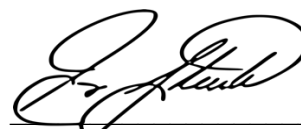
Jim Banks
Member of Congress



Michael Waltz
Member of Congress



Doug Lamborn



W. Gregory Steube

⁷https://twitter.com/BrendanCarrFCC/status/1541823585957707776?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1541823585957707776%7Ctwgr%5E838613224761f7b945c139fc2b60008cc8833ccd%7Ctwcon%5Es1&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.androidpolice.com%2Ffcc-commissioner-labels-tiktok-spyware-app-store-removal%2F

⁸ <https://www.foxbusiness.com/technology/house-of-representatives-officer-warns-members-congress-not-use-high-risk-tiktok>

⁹ <https://www.axios.com/2021/05/11/china-foreign-influence-spending>

Member of Congress



Lisa McClain
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Member of Congress

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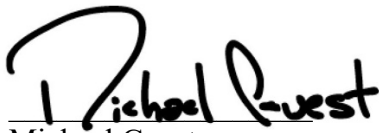
Kat Cammack
Kat Cammack
Member of Congress



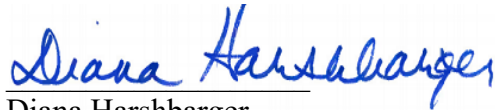
Vicky Hartzler
Vicky Hartzler
Member of Congress



Glenn Grothman
Glenn Grothman
Member of Congress



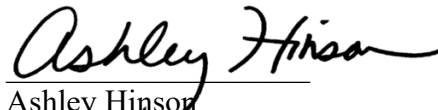
Michael Guest
Michael Guest
Member of Congress



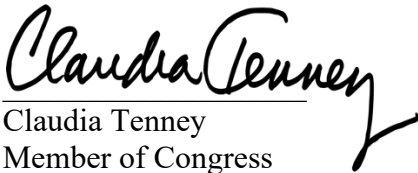
Diana Harshbarger
Diana Harshbarger
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Debbie Lesko
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Claudia Tenney
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