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PENNSYLVANIA

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# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 14, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

On October 26, I wrote to you as officials from your Administration prepared to meet with People's Republic of China (PRC) Foreign Minister and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Foreign Affairs Commission Director Wang Yi. In that letter, I requested that those meetings focus on two of the most pressing challenges currently facing the United States: the fentanyl crisis and the ongoing conflict between Israel and terrorist groups like Hamas. As you prepare to meet with PRC President and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, I urge you to ensure President Xi commits to meaningful action to go after Chinese chemical companies fueling the fentanyl epidemic in our country, and to continue to stress the need for President Xi to denounce Hamas as a terrorist organization and demand the immediate release of all remaining hostages held by Hamas.

As you know, overdose deaths, particularly among young people, are increasing across our Nation due to the ongoing fentanyl crisis. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated that, from May 2022 to May 2023, more than 112,000 people died from a drug overdose, including over 78,000 from synthetic opioids other than methadone.<sup>1</sup> This is an increase from the nearly 107,000 drug overdose deaths reported by the CDC in 2021.<sup>2</sup> As of October 2023, law enforcement agencies have seized over 55 million pills of fentanyl this year and more than 9,000 pounds of fentanyl powder.<sup>3</sup> The fentanyl crisis does not discriminate between urban, suburban, and rural parts of our Nation. In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, from April 2022 to March 2023, the rate of overdose deaths per 100,000 residents in Philadelphia rose to 89.3, the second-highest in the country.<sup>4</sup> In Allegheny County, 81 percent of all overdose deaths in that span were linked to fentanyl.<sup>5</sup> In rural Huntingdon County, fentanyl

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/dea-seized-over-55-million-fentanyl-pills-so-far-in-2023-garland-says/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sfchronicle.com/projects/us-drug-overdose-deaths/?fips=42101>

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

was involved in every single overdose death during that time.<sup>6</sup> In Montour County, home to 18,091 residents, the rate of overdose deaths per 100,000 residents reached 82.9.<sup>7</sup>

To stop the flow of fentanyl into American communities, we must stop it at the source. Prior to 2020, China was the primary source for all fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances trafficked into the United States.<sup>8</sup> At the urging of the United States, the Chinese government imposed stricter regulations in 2019 to try and crack down on the production and sale of fentanyl, but these regulations have merely shifted China's role in the illicit fentanyl supply chain. Instead of shipping illicit fentanyl directly to the United States, Chinese companies now ship chemicals and ingredients, known as precursors, to Mexico, where they are synthesized into fentanyl and trafficked into the United States by Mexican cartels.

I applaud you and your Administration for the steps that you have taken to address fentanyl precursor trafficking from China, including adding the PRC to the U.S. list of the world's major illicit drug-producing and drug-transit countries,<sup>9</sup> but we must do more. That is why I was pleased that the Fentanyl Eradication and Narcotics Deterrence (FEND) Off Fentanyl Act was included in the Senate-passed FY24 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).<sup>10</sup> Among other things, this bill would declare the international trafficking of fentanyl to be a national emergency, and it would enhance current law so that the federal government can better combat illicit opioid supply chains by imposing tough sanctions on transnational organizations, such as those operating in China and Mexico. I will continue to fight to include the FEND Off Fentanyl Act in the final NDAA that comes out of conference, and I urge you to sign it into law if given the opportunity.

Furthermore, I have been encouraged by recent reports of an agreement between the United States and China to crack down on fentanyl trafficking.<sup>11</sup> While I understand that a possible deal is still in the process of being finalized, I encourage you to ensure that any final agreement requires President Xi to take meaningful action against chemical companies in China. As I noted in my October 26 letter, there are many common-sense measures that the PRC could commit to taking to reduce fentanyl trafficking. Among these, the PRC could implement know-your-customer rules to help ensure that PRC chemical companies cannot use a middleman to divert fentanyl precursors to Mexican cartels. It could also enforce stricter labeling requirements for international chemical shipments to help ensure that precursor chemicals are not mislabeled or misdeclared in international trade. President Xi could also commit to greater information sharing

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<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2020-03/DEA\\_GOV\\_DIR-008-20%20Fentanyl%20Flow%20in%20the%20United%20States\\_0.pdf](https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2020-03/DEA_GOV_DIR-008-20%20Fentanyl%20Flow%20in%20the%20United%20States_0.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/09/15/memorandum-on-presidential-determination-on-major-drug-transit-or-major-illicit-drug-producing-countries-for-fiscal-year-2024/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/1271/>;  
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/2226>

<sup>11</sup> <https://triblive.com/news/world/biden-xi-to-announce-deal-for-china-to-crack-down-on-fentanyl/>

and cooperation with United States agencies and international partners regarding the flow of nonscheduled chemicals and precursor chemicals.

Even if President Xi were to agree to every one of these measures in a final deal, however, his commitments would be meaningless without effective enforcement. I urge you not only to ensure that President Xi commits to meaningful action to address the fentanyl crisis, but that he also intends to follow through on his commitments through strict enforcement. Furthermore, if reports are correct and your Administration intends to lift restrictions on the PRC's Institution of Forensic Science of the Ministry of Public Security in exchange for President Xi's commitments on combatting fentanyl trafficking, I urge you to seek new and alternative ways to hold PRC entities, such as the forensics police institute, accountable for human rights abuses against and the repression of Uyghurs in China.<sup>12</sup>

The second issue I request that you raise with President Xi is the recent escalation of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Though the Chinese government has reiterated its support for a two-state solution since October 20,<sup>13</sup> it has failed to condemn Hamas' October 7 slaughter of civilians and taking of hostages. I wholeheartedly agree with your description of the Hamas' attacks as "pure unadulterated evil" and believe it necessary for China to recognize and condemn that evil—both to acknowledge the suffering of Hamas' victims and their families, and to enable frank cooperation on a two-state solution after Israel has destroyed Hamas' military capacity.

On October 14, only a week after Hamas' slaughter and before Israel could have possibly hoped to reduce Hamas' terrorist network and tunnels, Foreign Minister Yi stated that, "Israel's actions have gone beyond the scope of self-defense."<sup>14</sup> Any country whose citizens are brutally attacked, kidnapped, and murdered should be able to respond in full force against the terrorist perpetrators of such attacks. As you and Chinese leadership have acknowledged,<sup>15</sup> Israel must continue to adhere to international humanitarian law in its engagements; but Hamas' military tactics of killing civilians and hiding behind hostages clearly violate such law, and China is hypocritical to not say so. To criticize Israel's defensive response without first criticizing Hamas' indiscriminate slaughter of the innocent not only discredits China's ambitions of moral leadership on the global stage, but also plays into Hamas' strategy to turn the international community against Israel and its right to defend itself.

In conversations with President Xi, I ask that you impress upon him the importance of denouncing Hamas' acts of terrorism against Israel and its military tactics of hiding behind

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<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/china-middle-east-envoy-israel-gaza-c08587a566ff38fec882118a0e117c3a>

<sup>14</sup> <https://time.com/6325352/china-israel-hamas-war/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/4288336-biden-reaffirms-israel-must-defend-self-international-humanitarian-law/>; [http://un.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/dbttx/czdbzjds/zjdshd/202310/t20231019\\_11163548.htm](http://un.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/dbttx/czdbzjds/zjdshd/202310/t20231019_11163548.htm)

civilians in violation of international law. I also urge that you request President Xi to call on Hamas to release its remaining hostages.

Thank you and your Administration for taking into consideration these requests.

Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

cc: National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan  
Secretary of State Antony Blinken