

Kansas House Commerce, Labor, and Economic Development Committee

Testimony of Brian Cavanaugh, Former Senior Director, the National Security Council and Senior Vice President, American Global Strategies, LLC

Proponent of HB 2820 – Prohibiting the Acquisition of Critical Components of Drone Technology from Countries of Concern

March 12, 2024

Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairman Tarwater, Ranking Member Probst, and the Members of the Committee for the opportunity to speak today in favor of HB 2820, regarding the concerning issue of allowing drones manufactured by Chinese-owned companies into the United States.

For the record, my name is Brian Cavanaugh, and I am a Senior Vice President for American Global Strategies, a consulting firm founded by former National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien and National Security Council Chief of Staff Alex Gray. Prior to joining American Global Strategies, I spent 12 years in the federal government, nine years with the Department of Homeland Security and three years at the White House on the National Security Council as Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and Senior Director for Resilience.

The influx of drones made by Chinese-owned companies presents a significant national security risk to the United States. These drones, equipped with advanced surveillance capabilities and often connected to foreign servers, pose a direct threat to our critical infrastructure, sensitive government installations, and citizen privacy.

China's strategic use of drones for espionage mirrors their broader asymmetric tactics aimed at undermining American security. By allowing Chinese-manufactured drones into our airspace, we provide a direct pathway for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to gather intelligence, map critical infrastructure, and potentially conduct cyber-attacks on our systems.

The inherent vulnerabilities in these drones, coupled with the complex supply chains controlled by Chinese companies, create an environment ripe for exploitation by adversarial actors. Even seemingly innocuous drones used for recreational purposes can be repurposed for nefarious activities, such as conducting reconnaissance on military installations or conducting cyber-attacks on civilian networks.

Furthermore, the use of Chinese-made drones jeopardizes our economic competitiveness and innovation. By flooding the market with cheap, subsidized drones, Chinese companies undercut American manufacturers, stifling innovation and threatening domestic industries. This

economic warfare tactic not only poses a threat to our national security but also undermines the foundation of our economy and industrial base.

The risks associated with Chinese-made drones extend beyond traditional security concerns to encompass broader societal implications. These drones have the potential to infringe upon the privacy rights of American citizens, as they can be used for indiscriminate surveillance and data collection. Additionally, the proliferation of Chinese-made drones raises concerns about intellectual property theft and the unauthorized transfer of sensitive technology to foreign adversaries.

In light of these risks, it is imperative that we take proactive measures to safeguard our national security and protect our citizens from the threats posed by Chinese-made drones. This includes implementing stringent regulations on the importation and use of drones, as well as investing in domestic manufacturing capabilities to reduce reliance on foreign suppliers.

State-level action is crucial in addressing this pressing issue. States should consider enacting legislation to prohibit the purchase of Chinese-made drones for use within the government sector, and prohibit the use of these drones, including recreational use, near military installations and critical infrastructure. Additionally, states can collaborate with federal agencies to establish comprehensive cybersecurity standards for drone manufacturers and operators.

In conclusion, the influx of drones made by Chinese-owned companies represents a significant national security risk to the United States. By strategically positioning themselves in our airspace, the CCP gains access to critical infrastructure, sensitive information, and citizen privacy. Addressing this threat requires a coordinated effort at both the state and federal levels to enact robust regulations and safeguard our national security interests.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue. I am available to answer any questions you may have.