

JOSH HAWLEY
MISSOURI

KYLE PLOTKIN
CHIEF OF STAFF

212 RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
TELEPHONE: (202) 224-6154
FAX: (202) 228-0526
WWW.HAWLEY.SENATE.GOV

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2509

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July 10, 2020

Adam Silver
Commissioner
National Basketball Association
645 5th Avenue
New York, NY 10022

Dear Mr. Silver,

On July 3, the National Basketball Association (NBA) came to an agreement with the NBA players union allowing players to wear certain social and political messages on their jerseys, almost all aligned with the message of recent anti-police protests. Conspicuously missing from the list of approved phrases are any in support of the victims of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), including the people of Hong Kong, whose remaining freedoms are being extinguished by the CCP's newly-enacted national security law.

Given the NBA's troubled history of excusing and apologizing for the brutal repression of the Chinese Communist regime, these omissions are striking. Last October, you no doubt recall, you chose to apologize to the CCP after Daryl Morey, General Manager of the Houston Rockets, spoke up on behalf of the Hong Kong protestors.

Following that shameful display, I encouraged you to reverse course. Instead, you have spent the intervening months deepening the NBA's ties to the CCP. Just last week, you described the October incident as "a bump in the road" in the NBA's relationship with the Chinese government. You went on to say that you understand that the CCP has "a different view of ... how things should be done," and that you hope the NBA and the CCP will be able to "find mutual respect for each other."

What offensive nonsense. No amount of profit can justify collaborating with a regime for which violent suppression and enslavement are routine tools of governance.

The league's new policy suggests a newfound commitment to enhanced employee expression. But that free expression appears to stop at the edge of your corporate sponsors' sensibilities. And for woke capital today, profits from the Chinese market are more popular than patriotism.

The truth is that your decisions about which messages to allow and which to censor – much like the censorship decisions of the CCP – are themselves statements about your association's values. If I am right – if the NBA is more committed to

promoting the CCP's interests than to celebrating its home nation – your fans deserve to know that is your view. If not, prove me wrong. Let your players stand up for the Uighurs and the people of Hong Kong. Let them stand up for American law enforcement if they so choose. Give them the choice to write “Back the Blue” on their jerseys. Or “Support our Troops.” Maybe “God Bless America.” What could be more American than that?

With your new policy, you have crossed the line of sanctioning specific political messages. There is no avoiding the work of clarifying the association's values now. This is a time for you to make clear what your league believes about human rights and about the nation that is your home. Your silence on these questions speaks volumes.

With that in mind, I request your response to the following questions by July 29, 2020:

1. Is the NBA prepared to allow its players to wear phrases in support of the United States, the American military, and U.S. law enforcement personnel, such as “God Bless America,” “Support Our Troops,” or “Back the Blue”? Will it censor players wearing such messages on their jerseys?
2. Are public reports correct that the list of phrases approved for display on NBA players' jerseys does not include messages in support of victims of the Chinese Communist Party?
3. If a player chooses to display a message of support for victims of the Chinese Communist Party on their jersey, will the NBA allow the player to wear their jersey or will it censor that player in order to avoid drawing Beijing's ire?
4. How does the NBA plan to defend NBA players and employees against retaliation by the Chinese Communist Party if they choose to speak out against the Party's actions in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, or elsewhere?
5. Is the NBA prepared to publicly condemn any attempt by the Chinese Communist Party to silence or punish these individuals?

I look forward to your answers. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Hawley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Josh" being particularly prominent and stylized.

Josh Hawley
United States Senator