

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-5000

September 4, 2020

The Honorable William P. Barr
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Barr,

I write with grave concern about potential Russian and Chinese efforts to influence U.S. environmental and energy policy, including through non-governmental organizations in the United States.

Environmental groups are major contributors to U.S. political campaigns and have filed hundreds of lawsuits against the Trump Administration in an effort to advance their agendas. This robust political and judicial activism—combined with the fact that these groups often espouse views that align with those of our adversaries—makes it all the more critical that the Department is aware of any potential foreign influence within or targeting these groups.

The Kremlin has for years made what appears to be a concerted effort to influence energy policy in the U.S. and Europe. Then-Secretary-General of NATO Anders Fogh Rasmussen said in 2014: “Russia, as part of their sophisticated information and disinformation operations, engaged actively with so-called non-governmental organizations—environmental organizations working against shale gas—to maintain European dependence on imported Russian gas.”¹ Further, according to a 2016 report, the Russian government invested \$97 million dollars in “NGOs whose job is to persuade EU governments to stop shale gas exploration.”² U.S. intelligence officials, congressional reports, and news reports have said that Russia also works to promote an anti-fracking narrative in the United States.^{3 4} Environmental groups such as the Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Council, whose anti-fracking agendas align with the Kremlin’s, are low-hanging fruit for Russian influence or support efforts in the United States.

¹ James Edgar, *Russia in secret plot against fracking, Nato chief says*, The Telegraph, June 19, 2014, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/energy/fracking/10911942/Russia-in-secret-plot-against-fracking-Nato-chief-says.html>

² Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, *The Bear in Sheep’s Clothing: Russia’s Government-Funded Organisations in the EU* (2016), <https://martenscentre.eu/publications/bear-sheeps-clothing-russias-government-funded-organisations-eu>

³ Eric Roston, *Putin’s Other American Propaganda Effort: Anti-Fracking News*, Bloomberg News, January 10, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-01-10/putin-s-other-american-propaganda-effort-anti-fracking-news>

⁴ United States House of Representatives Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, *Russian Attempts to Influence U.S. Domestic Energy Markets by Exploiting Social Media* (2018), <https://republicans-science.house.gov/sites/republicans.science.house.gov/files/documents/SST%20Staff%20Report%20-%20Russian%20Attempts%20to%20Influence%20U.S.%20Domestic%20Energy%20Markets%20by%20Exploiting%20Social%20Media%2003.01.18.pdf>

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), like the Russian government, also engages in extensive influence operations. As stated by the Hoover Institution: “China seeks to promote views sympathetic to the Chinese Government, policies, society, and culture; suppress alternative views; and co-opt key American players to support China’s foreign policy goals and economic interests.”⁵ My colleagues on the House Natural Resources Committee noted⁶ in 2018 that the Natural Resources Defense Council “consistently praise[s]” the Chinese Communist Party’s environmental initiatives and “promote[s] the image of China as a global environmental leader.” The NRDC maintains a presence in China and has long worked with CCP officials. Meanwhile, the group touts the dozens of lawsuits that it has launched against the Trump Administration. It has also previously sued the U.S. Navy in an effort to stop critical exercises in the Pacific, but has shied away from criticizing China’s damaging and illegal militarization of coral reefs in the South China Sea.⁷ This behavior—combined with the NRDC’s history of working with the CCP and its presence in China—makes it a high-value target.

Malign influence efforts by Russia or China, whether related to U.S. energy policy or politics, are a threat to this nation and must be combatted. I urge the Department to investigate Chinese and Russian attempts to influence environmental and energy policy in the United States, including within or through groups such as the NRDC, Sea Change, the Sierra Club, and others.

Sincerely,



Liz Cheney
Member of Congress

CC:

Administrator Andrew R. Wheeler, Environmental Protection Agency

⁵ Hoover Institution, *Chinese Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance* (2018), https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/chineseinfluence_americaninterests_fullreport_web.pdf

⁶ Letter to NRDC from Reps. Bishop and Westerman, June 5, 2018, https://republicans-naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/bishop-westerman_to_nrdc_06.05.18.pdf

⁷ *Id.*