



**Statement of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown, Cochairman of the  
Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC)**

**CECC Hearing on “China’s Censorship of the Internet and  
Social Media: The Human Toll and Trade Impact”**

**Thursday, November 17, 2011, Washington, D.C.**

The business of the Internet and social media is changing the way the world works. Just take a look at all the smartphones in this room. It has changed the way we live, the way we do business, and the way we act as a society. It has changed the world. It has made people closer to their governments and made those governments more accountable and interactive, and in the case of the “Arab Spring,” it has helped topple dictators.

The purpose of today’s hearing is to shed light on the darkness of China’s repressive Internet and social media censorship. It is a policy that takes a very human toll, undermining human rights reforms and freedoms of expression and speech. And it is a policy that is unfair to U.S. trade interests, especially for U.S. tech companies.

It’s well-documented that Chinese officials block access to many Web sites, including this Commission’s. Some sites are blocked because they are considered politically sensitive, and others for reasons that we can only guess.

China’s Internet control forces private companies – including U.S. companies – to censor the Internet based on vague and arbitrary standards. Many companies are forced to operate in an opaque world that we know surprisingly little about.

This policy benefits Chinese domestic companies at the expense of companies like Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube who are completely blocked in China. Companies whose business models rely on openness and transparency – are forced to be an arm of the Chinese government or turn their backs on 1.3 billion customers.

But it isn’t just Silicon Valley companies that are blocked in China. It’s also Ohio companies like Graftech and Edgetech that risk having their Web sites blocked or disrupted as they try to sell their products and services to reach Chinese consumers. When U.S. companies go public with complaints about these restrictions, as Google did last year, they risk retaliation by the Chinese government for doing so. Google is a company that made the unfortunate decision to work with the Chinese government. In the end it did not work out well for them.

In the absence of meaningful competition, copycat versions of Twitter and Facebook flourish in China and raise hundreds of millions of dollars, ironically, on our capital markets. For instance, in May of this year, Renren, China’s version of “Facebook,” raised \$743 million in an IPO listed on the New York Stock Exchange. These Chinese companies are beholden to the Chinese government and Communist Party and censorship has increased – yet they want access to our



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free and open society. As arms of the Chinese government, these moves should be closely scrutinized.

China now has over half a billion Internet users, more than any country in the world. Most of these Internet users are young, and far more aware of Chinese and world developments than their parents. Knowledge and openness are big threats to totalitarian regimes – we know that and the Chinese government knows that. In our country knowledge and openness are pillars of our form of government.

Take the case of outspoken dissident artist Ai Weiwei. His savvy social networking skills and unabashed criticism of the government landed him an 81-day detention at a secret location earlier this year. Now the government wants him to pay \$2.4 million in alleged unpaid taxes and penalties – by Tuesday. Thousands of supporters in China have sent him money over the Internet. And Ai continues to defy government orders by using Twitter to publicize his case.

In recent years the Commission has documented a growing number of cases of political imprisonment involving the Internet. Behind each case is a story and a family.

One of those cases is Mr. Li Yuanlong. Li is a journalist who was imprisoned for two years for criticizing the Communist Party online. That’s why we’re so grateful that Li’s son, Alex, a fellow Ohioan and a student at Bowling Green State University, is here to tell Li’s story.

Last month the U.S. Trade Representative filed a request for information with the World Trade Organization on China’s Internet censorship. I applaud this move as a positive first step and look forward to learning what we can do to address this pressing issue. Too much is at stake – the human toll becomes insufferable, the economic threat undermines American innovation.

China plays by its own rules because we regrettably, in this institution and in our government, let them. We cannot simply wait out the inevitable power of the Internet to move the hearts and minds of the Chinese people. We must do all we can to shine the light where free expression, thought, and commerce are too often kept in the dark.

Thank you.