

Greater Bay Area Dialogue

SPEECH TRANSCRIPT

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Virtual

REMARKS FROM NATIONAL COMMITTEE PRESIDENT STEPHEN A. ORLINS

I am sorry to not be there in person. I just returned from twenty-three days in China, so I couldn't return to attend this important conference. The warmth of the reception, the joy of seeing old friends, and the important in-person discussions that occurred reminded me that one of the primary causes of the downturn in U.S.-China relations is the lack of people-to-people exchanges, the lack of face-to-face meetings. As the cohost of the first people-to-people exchange, the visit of the Chinese ping pong team to the U.S. in 1972, we at the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations know the value of cultural and diplomatic exchanges. We must have hundreds of metaphorical ping-pong teams in 2023.

Both governments are working productively to increase visa issuance, but we must find a way to increase flights between China and America. The cost and inconvenience of flying between our two countries is discouraging the people-to-people contact we so desperately need. When I talk to the Chinese and U.S. governments, increasing those flights is first on my list of issues. The governments and the air carriers can and should find a solution to this issue and allow us to start down a path where the U.S.-China relationship benefits the peoples of both countries.

Government officials, media, academics, and friends in the United States and China all ask me, "Are you optimistic or pessimistic about U.S.-China relations?" My answer is always the same. It depends on what you do! If our governments don't change some of their policies, if media does not broadcast a different narrative, if academics or my friends fear publishing papers or speaking out about how constructive U.S.-China relations benefit the Chinese and American peoples then we are doomed to follow the path that we are on. I recently joined Maurice R. Greenberg and other concerned Americans in an open letter calling on our two countries' leaders to find a safe and productive path forward. I know many of you here share this same view.

I've seen firsthand the wide-reaching impact that courageous and bold leadership can have. As you all know, my first real job in life was working in the Legal Advisors Office of the United States State Department. In an event that would change my life, I was put on the team to help establish diplomatic relations with the PRC. I watched as President Carter and Deng Xiaoping boldly acted to break a six year log jam blocking the countries from establishing diplomatic relations. People in both countries opposed their actions. U.S. media called the proposal "controversial" and warned of "Mao's Red Shadow" spreading over the country. An editorial in Renmin Ribao warned that the United States was the "most energetic and cunning in promoting neo-

colonialism” and called on workers of the world to stand against the United States and its “lackeys.” Despite this domestic opposition, Carter and Deng’s strength and vision allowed them to act. Forty-four years later, the results speak for themselves. We have had peace in the Asia Pacific and economic prosperity unrivaled in history. Carter and Deng were right to overrule domestic critics. The lesson for today is that both Presidents need to act boldly, need to overrule domestic opposition, and put our countries on a path that preserves peace and prosperity for the peoples of both countries.

Our presidents must meet in person regularly and speak at least monthly. Their recent meeting in Bali showed that meetings can produce positive outcomes. Unfortunately, subsequent events derailed that progress, but that does not mean they should not try again.

Regular meetings among ministers should also resume and produce substantive outcomes. Some relatively easy ones involve restarting healthcare cooperation, reopening the Chinese consulate in Houston and the American Consulate in Chengdu, ending both sides’ tariffs instituted since January 20, 2017, reaching an agreement on what trade, investment, and data is off limits because of national security concerns, cooperating on measures to combat climate change, restarting judicial assistance to help combat illicit drug and human trafficking, and regularizing military to military contact so mistakes don’t happen.

Many people will say I am too optimistic and U.S.-China relations are too difficult to even accomplish the easy things. I say absolutely not. And we all, and I mean every person in this room, must work together to get our governments to do what is in the interests of both people.

In August of last year when the SFRC, MOF, SEC, and PCAOB signed an agreement to allow the audit of Chinese companies listed on U.S. stock exchanges. I celebrated. From my perspective, it was a win-win solution. The companies benefited, the shareholders benefited, the U.S. capital markets benefited so all sides had an interest in implementing the agreement. But many were skeptical that the agreement would be implemented; after all, it took more than 10 years to negotiate. Our own SEC Chair, Gary Gensler, said that “the proof is in the pudding” and that it would be “up to our counterparts in China [to] comply with the requirements of U.S. law.” History has shown that my optimism was right, and the agreement is being successfully implemented.

The other issues I mention are the same. Implementing my suggestions will immediately benefit people on both sides of the Pacific. If some or all of these suggestions can be implemented, the two governments can break the downward spiral in the U.S.-China relationship. Rather than tit for tat, we will create a virtuous cycle where one good deed begets another.

In the years prior to the National Committee hosting the Chinese ping pong team, U.S.-China relations were nonexistent. China was communist bandits, and America was imperialist jackals. The leadership of Nixon, Kissinger, Mao, and Zhou changed the direction of the relationship. Our hosting the Chinese ping pong team started a people-to-people relationship that served as the foundation for the political relationship. And then, Carter and Deng cemented the relationship by establishing diplomatic relations. We need similarly bold and brave leadership, and we need to restart people-to-people relations. I and the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations will do all that we can to accomplish that goal. I hope you will too. Thank you, and I look forward to seeing you in person soon.