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161 U.S. HOUSE MEMBERS CALL FOR TRADE AGREEMENT WITH TAIWAN

A total of 161 bipartisan members of the U.S. House of Representatives have sent a letter to U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer urging him to open negotiations on a bilateral trade deal with Taiwan that addresses "existing market access issues." The letter said an agreement would create jobs in the U.S. and reaffirm America's commitment to Taiwan. Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen supports such a trade agreement, and has said as much most recently in November during a speech at the American Chamber of Commerce in Taipei. The sticking point is Taipei's restrictions on U.S. beef and pork exports. Taiwan is the U.S.' 11th largest trading partner, the 8th largest export market for American agricultural products, a major purchaser of U.S. gas exports, and supplies semiconductors used by U.S. manufacturers. (Central News Agency, December 20, 2019)

CHINA'S "GREAT FRIENDSHIP" WITH MICRONESIA A STRATEGIC HEADACHE FOR THE U.S.

Last month, Micronesian President David Panuelo climbed the Great Wall, joined Chinese President Xi Jinping in marking three decades of diplomatic ties, and inked \$72 million in deals, totaling as much as China's total investment in the country of 113,000 citizens over the previous three decades. Panuelo said China is Micronesia's top economic partner and the U.S. is its top security partner. In fact, Micronesia relies largely on remittances from its citizens working in the U.S. and financial support from Washington under the Compact of Free Association (COFA). In exchange, Micronesia, Palau, and the Marshall Islands grant the U.S. exclusive military access to their territorial waters – more than 2 million square miles of the Pacific that have made U.S. power projection possible. "China's interest in building the relationship with Micronesia is not just about its diplomatic rivalry with Taiwan or economic interests. It has elevated the relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership which encompasses all areas," said Jian Zhang of the Australian Defense Force Academy. COFA will expire in 2023, creating an opportunity for Beijing to undermine Micronesia's security relationship with the U.S. (*South China Morning Post*, December 23, 2019)

NEW CODE OF CONDUCT FOR JOURNALISTS

The All-China Journalists Association has issued an updated code of conduct covering personal conduct and political mindsets and calls on reporters to uphold the CPC authority and be guided by Xi Jinping Thought. According to the new code, which was last updated in 2009, journalists must be loyal to "the Party, the motherland, and the people." When covering domestic affairs, reporters must have the correct mindset and "arm their minds with Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era." All journalists must "firmly uphold the authority and centralized, unified leadership of the Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core." The code requires journalists to "show a good image" when reporting for foreign audiences, and "actively build a bridge between China and the outside world." It also encourages journalists to: "Be good at using new technologies and new applications on the internet, and continuously improve the level of positive propaganda and guiding public opinion on the internet." (CNN, December 17, 2019)

CHINA RESPONDS HARSHLY TO SOCCER STAR'S CRITICISM OF UIGHUR MISTREATMENT

After he criticized China's treatment of Uighur Muslims in posts on Twitter and Instagram and called Uighurs "warriors who resist persecution," Mesut Ozil, a star midfielder for Arsenal in England's Premier league, was removed from three versions of the Pro Evolution Soccer video game. After Ozil's comments, Beijing pressured NetEase, who publishes the Pro Evolution Soccer games in China, to announce that Ozil will be removed from the game because his comments "hurt the feelings of Chinese fans and violated the sport's spirit of love and peace." State TV also scrapped live coverage of the Arsenal v. Manchester City game and a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said Ozil directly had been "blinded and misled" and invited him to visit Xinjiang. (*Daily Mail*, December 18, 2019)

XINJIANG PROGRAM PLACES HAN MEN WITH UIGHUR WOMEN

China's "Pair Up and Become Family" program places Han Chinese men in the homes and often the beds of Uighur women after their husbands have been detained in prison camps. An official said the program "promotes ethnic unity," and "helps the families with their ideology, bringing new ideas. They talk to them about life, during which time they develop feelings for one another." The new "relatives" would never take advantage of women and sleep at least a meter apart from their female hosts, he added. In truth, neither the women nor their families can reject such a guest's advances because they will be accused of extremism for not wanting to marry an atheist Han. There are reports of increasing numbers of unplanned pregnancies and forced abortions in the province. (*New Zealand Herald*, December 21, 2019)