Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 17, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, DC 20590

The Honorable Gina M. Raimondo
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Buttigieg and Secretary Raimondo:

We write to bring your attention to the competitive and national security implications of allowing autonomous vehicles (AVs) made by Chinese companies to test and operate in the United States.

Autonomous vehicles are essential to the future of the automotive industry and continuing the global leadership of this country. Last year, nearly 43,000 people died in motor vehicle traffic crashes.[1] This is a national crisis that we have unfortunately come to expect. AVs and their already regulated predecessors, advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS), are the key to reducing and even eliminating traffic fatalities.

But Americans will not benefit from the future AVs promise to bring if the United States continues its current trajectory of inaction. China is already filling the void to set global standards, establish supply chains, and deploy the technology on its own.

As you know, the United States is in an ongoing competitive race with China across many fronts, of which autonomous vehicle development and deployment is an essential sector. China recognizes that autonomous technology will be a driving force in this century and have immense implications on national security and economic leadership. In 2020, China's National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, and 11 other ministries and commissions jointly issued a strategy that prioritizes autonomous-driving technology.[2]

Since then, China's AV industry has grown beyond even Beijing's regulatory framework, with significant growth in robotaxi services, computing, and infrastructure. Much of that success has hinged on their advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), with companies like ByteDance Ltd. establishing the country's largest computing center for autonomous-driving infrastructure and the creation of DriveGPT, which like ChatGPT, relies on reinforced learning with human feedback.[3]

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[1] https://www.nhtsa.gov/press-releases/traffic-crash-death-estimates-2022
[2] https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/automotive-and-assembly/our-insights/from-sci-fi-to-reality-autonomous-driving-in-china
[3] https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2023-04-24/autonomous-vehicles-tesla-needs-to-catch-up-with-china-s-drivegpt

The People's Republic of China also has strong restrictions on United States autonomous vehicle companies operating or testing in China. We are concerned that we are ceding a serious strategic advantage by not barring Chinese companies from operating in the United States in return.

AV testing and deployment regulations are fragmented state-by-state and even city-by-city in the United States. While the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has a "Test Tracking Tool" as a part of their Automated Vehicle Transparency and Engagement for Safe Testing (AV TEST) Initiative, participating in the list is voluntary and does not include any of the Chinese AV companies known to be testing the United States.[4]

In California, seven Chinese companies have licenses to test their AV technology, including international industry leaders Baidu Apollo and Pony.ai. Pony.ai also has a permit to test in Arizona. In the span of a year, the seven companies collectively logged nearly half a million miles on roads in California.[5] This level of testing not only raises the competitive concerns highlighted above, but we believe also opens the country up to national security risks.

Technology used by AVs, LiDAR, RADAR, cameras, AI, and other advanced sensors and semiconductors, can all be used to collect data on the American people and infrastructure that could be shared back to China and ultimately to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The massive amount of data being collected by these cars could give the CCP an unprecedented vantage point into the United States. Beijing has already pioneered the use of big-data analytics to identify dissidents at home, and we are concerned that those tactics could be deployed here and abroad.

As we spend billions of dollars to strip Chinese communications equipment from our networks to protect our national security, we are concerned that we are turning a blind eye to the risks of allowing Chinese AVs and AV technology unencumbered access to our networks and roadways.

We urge you to seriously consider the national security and competitive risks of allowing Chinese autonomous vehicle companies and technology producers to operate and test in the United States, all while restricting American companies from testing on roads in China. We ask that you coordinate with NHTSA, as well as any other relevant agency, to investigate the prevalence of these companies in our country and identify pathways to restricting their access and ability to operate here. It is imperative that we prioritize American leadership in autonomous vehicle technology and do not cede competitive advantages to an adversarial nation that does not share our values and commitment to freedom.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

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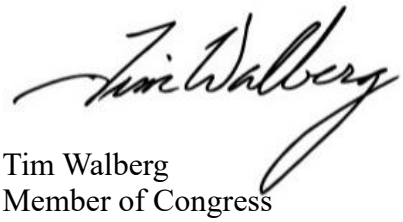
[4] https://www.nhtsa.gov/automated-vehicle-test-tracking-tool#:~:text=As%20automated%20driving%20systems%20developers,of%20the%20AV%20TEST%20Initiative.
[5] https://thechinaproject.com/2023/02/28/chinese-autonomous-vehicle-testing-in-california-is-coming-under-growing-scrutiny/#:~:text=Chasing%20Cruise%20and%20Waymo%2C%20Chinese,in%20California%20in%202022%20%2F%20TechCrunch

Sincerely,



Tim Walberg
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

Robert E. Latta
Member of Congress

Marc Veasey
Member of Congress

CC: Ann Carlson, Acting Administrator, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration