# US states introduce over 240 laws to limit Chinese influence amid growing security concerns



State lawmakers in the United States have introduced more than 240 proposals this year aimed at limiting Chinese influence across various sectors, reflecting a growing trend by state governments to restrict public funds from being used on Chinese technology and goods. These bills, introduced in at least 41 states, largely in Republican-controlled legislatures, seek to ban purchases ranging from drones and software to promotional items such as T-shirts and key chains associated with China. Some measures extend to severing sister-city relationships between American and Chinese communities.

Among the states enacting these laws, Kansas has passed legislation that includes artificial intelligence and medical equipment restrictions, while Arkansas has introduced laws targeting local contracts and sister-city ties. Tennessee has prohibited health insurance coverage for organ transplants conducted in China or involving Chinese-sourced organs.

Arkansas Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders, a prominent advocate of these policies, described her wide-ranging “Communist China Defense” package as integral to national competitiveness, stating, “Either the United States or China is going to lead the world in the next few decades. For me, I want it to be the U.S.” She also noted that these efforts complement former President Donald Trump’s trade policies, which marked a shift from previous administrations.

Political analysts attribute this surge in anti-China legislation to a shift initiated during Trump’s first term, where his administration adopted a less favourable stance towards state and local engagement with China. Kyle Jaros, an associate professor of global affairs at the University of Notre Dame, commented that “The first Trump administration had a very different message than the preceding Obama administration about state and local engagement with China. It tended to not see the value.” The COVID-19 pandemic further worsened public attitudes towards China, amplifying calls for tighter scrutiny of Chinese involvement within the US.

David Adkins, a former Kansas legislator and CEO of the nonpartisan Council on State Governments, highlighted the political advantages of adopting strong positions on China, saying in an email that “Politicians of both parties, at all levels of government, pay no price for vilifying China.” Academic John David Minnich of the London School of Economics, however, suggested these measures stem largely from “targeted, strategic lobbying,” rather than widespread public pressure.

The shift in attitude was also influenced by specific incidents such as the appearance of a Chinese surveillance balloon over US territory in 2023, which intensified concerns about espionage and national security. Sara Newland, an associate professor of government at Smith College, noted that “There is this idea that a Chinese investment is actually going to result in the Chinese government spying on individual people or threatening food security in a particular area.”

Kansas House Majority Leader Chris Croft, a retired Army colonel, summed up the cross-governmental approach needed to address these concerns, stating, “All of us have a part to play.” His own leadership helped enact a law restricting property ownership near military installations by foreign adversaries, including China, Cuba, Iran, and North Korea.

Despite widespread support in some quarters for further restrictions—such as on foreign ownership of agricultural land—critics point out that the actual extent of Chinese ownership remains minimal. According to a 2023 U.S. Department of Agriculture report, Chinese interests owned approximately 277,000 acres of American farmland, less than 0.02% of the total 1.27 billion acres in the country. Similarly, Arkansas’ restrictions on sister-city relationships affect only Little Rock.

Scepticism around these measures is even present among conservatives. In North Dakota, lawmakers debated divesting billions from state funds tied to Chinese companies, prompted by a Chinese company's plan to develop farmland near an Air Force base. However, a Senate vote rejected a weaker measure, with Republican Senator Dale Patten highlighting the practical difficulty of such bans because “I would guess that this body right now is already heavily invested in neckties that have been manufactured in China.”

Looking ahead, experts suggest that the future of these state-level initiatives depends partly on federal policy shifts. Minnich noted that if sustained US-China decoupling under Trump’s policies were to continue, states’ actions might have limited short-term effects compared to federal measures. Nonetheless, state lawmakers are unlikely to abandon their efforts, given ongoing concerns about cybersecurity threats and dependencies on Chinese equipment in critical infrastructure. Jaros remarked, “The vast majority of China’s threats to the U.S. are in cyberspace. Some of those defenses are still not solid.”

This growing wave of anti-China legislation at the state level underscores a complex and evolving landscape in US-China relations, where economic, technological, and security considerations intersect with political and public sentiment. The Associated Press contributed reporting from Little Rock, Arkansas, and Bismarck, North Dakota.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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