

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMUNICATIONS DECENCY ACT

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, for almost 25 years, the internet has grown and thrived under the light-touch regulatory framework established by the Communications Decency Act. I hope we can continue that. I think some changes need to be made.

Passed in 1996, the law that the Communications Decency Act is a part of helped create the internet. Section 230 of that law gives broad liability protections to interactive computer services, such as Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms. This provision protects online platforms from being held liable for content posted by their users.

This is a unique protection for online platforms, and not everyone in our country enjoys those protections. For example, newspapers do not enjoy this important protection. But we have done this for internet platforms.

At the same time, section 230 of the Communications Decency Act allows online platforms to censor content that they—the platforms—consider obscene, lewd, harassing, along with several other categories, including the term “otherwise objectionable.”

I am concerned that this term, “otherwise objectionable,” is too broad and ends up protecting online platforms when they remove content that they simply disagree with or dislike or find distasteful personally.

I fear section 230 has enabled big tech companies to censor conservative views and voices, and I am joined by a lot of Americans in that view. As such, this provision has become a loophole for censoring free speech, and it risks negating the values at the very heart of our First Amendment.

In the last few years, reports of online censorship of conservative viewpoints have grown more frequent. In early 2018, for example, an undercover report exposed Twitter for systematically “shadow banning” conservative profiles—meaning users were blocked from the platform without being notified.

More recently, Google threatened to demonetize a conservative news site, The Federalist, for not removing offensive content in their comment section. Based upon information I received, the comments may indeed have been derogatory and unacceptable. But what is noteworthy is that Google’s threat toward the Federalist was hyperselective and a bit hypocritical. Google held the Federalist accountable for comments made by the Federalist readers, but Google does not want to be held responsible for the posts or comments by users on Google’s platforms, including YouTube—a double standard imposed by Google itself. This selective scrutiny reveals what most Americans already believe: that tech companies are politically biased.

According to a 2018 Pew study, 7 out of 10 Americans believed social media

companies censor political viewpoints that they find objectionable. That was 2 years ago. It has only worsened in the 2 years since then.

These concerns come at a time when tech companies wield unprecedented power within our economy and our culture at large, and no one can deny that. A bipartisan chorus of committee members from the other body pointed this out just last week. More and more of our daily business is taking place online, and that trend is only accelerating during the current pandemic.

As we near the 2020 election, Americans have serious concerns about whether online platforms will treat campaigns on both sides of the aisle fairly and equally. Those concerns are warranted. I have those concerns. Americans are right to be worried about interference by politically homogenous tech firms that hold unprecedented sway over our Nation’s political discourse.

After 24 years, it is time for Congress to revisit section 230 of the Communications Decency Act and start with refining—perhaps narrowing—the scope of what counts as otherwise objectionable content subject to censors. There may be other reforms that would be better, but I think it is time for Congress and the committee that I chair to revisit this section of the law.

Last week, the Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, Innovation, and the Internet convened a hearing to consider exactly this issue, and it was a very good hearing. As chairman of the Commerce Committee, I intend to pursue this matter thoroughly and evaluate what changes are needed to section 230. Congress needs to ensure that the internet remains a forum for a “true diversity of political discourse” that promotes competition and innovation.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOZMAN). The clerk will call the roll. The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CHINA

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, last week, journalists at ESPN published the results of a bombshell investigation into human rights violations at NBA training academies in China.

When you think about a basketball camp, you probably think of shooting drills or running sprints, but these camps look much different. The investigation focused on training camps located in Xinjiang. This particular region in western China has achieved a certain level of notoriety in recent months for the horrific political violence its government officials inflict on the Uighur Muslim minority. So it is no surprise that the stories told by trainers, coaches, and other NBA employees who helped to run these camps

employ disturbing and familiar imagery.

According to the ESPN investigation, one former league employee compared the atmosphere at the Xinjiang camp to “World War II Germany.”

An American coach, who worked at a similar facility, described it as a “sweat camp for athletes.”

Now, according to the investigation, almost immediately after the NBA launched this program back in 2016, multiple coaches who were staffing the camps reported to high-ranking organization officials that they had witnessed Chinese coaches beating and berating student athletes. Bear in mind that these reports were made in 2016. They also reported that the Chinese Communist Party officials who were in charge of the camp were denying students an education.

In coming to this elite camp, they were to receive both an education and elevated sports training, but the reports, going back to 2016, said the children were being abused, beaten, berated, and denied the education. So why then did the NBA maintain these programs?

Money.

Communist China plays host to an estimated \$4 billion NBA market. They say that China is basketball-obsessed, and NBA execs have used every avenue they can to take advantage of that, and they jealously protect these relationships.

Last October, when Houston Rockets’ General Manager Daryl Morey tweeted in support of the Hong Kong Freedom Fighters, multiple league all-stars, stakeholders, and well-connected employees lashed out in a panic—terrified of retaliation from Beijing.

Team owner and Alibaba co-founder Joe Tsai not only sided with the Chinese Communist Party as it retaliated against the entire league, but he characterized the Hong Kong protesters as leading a separatist movement.

Their over-the-top reactions are proof enough of how fragile the NBA’s relationship with China actually is and who is really in control of this relationship. The control is not with the NBA.

In June, I sent a letter to the NBA, expressing my concerns about the training camps in Xinjiang and the league’s entanglement with the Chinese Communist Party. In their response, they announced that they had closed their facilities in the region and that they had severed their ties to any programs there.

The problem is that the ESPN report I referenced previously disputes that assertion. I am reaching out for clarification on that matter, but in their response, I hope NBA officials express clarity regarding all—each and every one—of their business relationships with China because the NBA and other organizations that maintain close ties to the Chinese Communist Party believe that they are merely taking advantage of a growing consumer market—or that is what they say. To them,

it is the smart, savvy play. That is what they believe. In reality, what they are doing is giving the ball away. They are playing right into Beijing's hands, and those hands are controlled by the Chinese Communist Party.

Since 2013, the CCP has operated under a grand strategy to stretch its influence across Europe, Africa, and Asia. This strategy is known as—quite elegantly, they think—the Belt and Road Initiative. It involves making interlinked investments over land and sea, which has formed the beginnings of a modern day Silk Road.

The Chinese Communist Party uses energy and transportation infrastructure development, as well as access to investment capital and trade opportunities, to force its way into the good graces of comparatively poor and still-developing nations.

I have seen this influence and its effects firsthand. Last year, I traveled to the Horn of Africa and spent some time in Djibouti—a country that welcomed China and the Belt and Road Initiative investments with open arms.

China now holds somewhere in the neighborhood of 80 percent of that country's national debt. This is 80 percent of its debt that is held by Communist China. The government in Djibouti, in turn, agreed to accommodate China's first overseas military outpost, grant access to a crucial sea lane, and implement the Orwellian smart cities program.

Now, I will tell you, if I asked you to picture a modern day surveillance state, the chances are the picture that would pop into your head would come pretty close to being what is happening right now in Djibouti City.

Yet the other thing I saw while in Djibouti was its vital strategic importance to the United States. Our military relationship is one that exists on the frontlines of great power competition, and it is essential to continue American commitment to and investment in African partners like Djibouti.

Wherever AFRICOM headquarters is located, we must not lose sight of the importance of resourcing the African continent for great power competition. This is the combatant command that consistently proves it can “do the most with the least,” and it is a front where we can play offense, not defense, against two of our major adversaries—China and Russia.

The way China does business makes maintaining these relationships incredibly important. The BRI functions behind a veil of secrecy to the tune of somewhere between \$1 trillion and \$8 trillion in foreign investment. Now, think about this. China invests its dollars in the United States. Currently, China holds over \$1.1 trillion in U.S. debt. It does that because Congress has the power of the purse, but Congress seems to think: Print more money. We can issue some debt. We can afford it. All the while, China is making money off of our debt. Then, with those profits, what is it doing? It is investing in countries around the globe.

As I said, with what we know now about the Belt and Road Initiative—the digital Silk Road, its push in the great power competition—it has now spent somewhere between \$1 trillion and \$8 trillion around the globe. Some of these countries, like Djibouti, are holding 80 percent of the debt in exchange for locating a military post, for having a naval base, for building out its spy network globally. This is what it is up to.

The low-interest loans China offers leads these countries into unsustainable debt burdens. Some countries' overall debts to China are well above 20 percent of their GDPs, and many of these loan recipients exist on the brink of a debt crisis. When you get in a debt crisis—when your debt is more than your income—what happens? The person holding your debt does what? We know. The person owns you.

In short, China has set a series of “debt traps” for smaller, struggling countries so they will just go tumbling over the cliff. For China, everything is going according to plan because that dependency translates to control over key strategic positions all over the globe.

Yet, pretty soon, if they are not careful, organizations like the NBA, the National Basketball Association, will be the “National Beijing Association.” What is it doing? It is ignoring this. Why is it ignoring it? Because it is convenient. Why is it convenient? The profits look good. It is making money. China is basketball-obsessed. Do we really think that makes it OK? I have to say that it is not OK.

What the NBA is doing is ignoring horrific human rights abuses—absolutely horrific. It is ignoring speech repression. It is ignoring political violence. It is ignoring religious persecution. It is doing it all in the name of finding its next basketball superstar, and it remains willfully blind to the manipulation tactics China uses to hide these abuses.

Whether we are talking about debt diplomacy or enthusiastic access to a willing market, all of it is offered up by the Chinese Communist Party as a distraction.

I have said repeatedly that the United States must take immediate steps to unravel our relationships with China. The rapid and unnecessary spread of COVID-19, caused by the Chinese Communist Party's reckless attitude in the early days of the pandemic, is proof enough of how dangerously vulnerable we are to the Chinese influence, but this unraveling cannot occur if governments and organizations alike refuse to acknowledge what the American people know to be true, which is that we had a real chance to keep China in check, but we missed the opportunity.

The only way that we can retake control of our interactions with Beijing is to retake control of our economy and set our own parameters for engage-

ment with what has become one of the most dangerous and powerful nations on the planet.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the previously referenced article from ESPN, dated July 29, 2020.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From ESPN.com, July 29, 2020]

ESPN INVESTIGATION FINDS COACHES AT NBA CHINA ACADEMIES COMPLAINED OF PLAYER ABUSE, LACK OF SCHOOLING
(By Steve Fainaru and Mark Fainaru-Wada)

Long before an October tweet in support of Hong Kong protesters spotlighted the NBA's complicated relationship with China, the league faced complaints from its own employees over human rights concerns inside an NBA youth-development program in that country, an ESPN investigation has found.

American coaches at three NBA training academies in China told league officials their Chinese partners were physically abusing young players and failing to provide schooling, even though commissioner Adam Silver had said that education would be central to the program, according to multiple sources with direct knowledge of the complaints.

The NBA ran into myriad problems by opening one of the academies in Xinjiang, a police state in western China where more than a million Uighur Muslims are now held in barbed-wire camps. American coaches were frequently harassed and surveilled in Xinjiang, the sources said. One American coach was detained three times without cause; he and others were unable to obtain housing because of their status as foreigners.

A former league employee compared the atmosphere when he worked in Xinjiang to “World War II Germany.”

In an interview with ESPN about its findings, NBA deputy commissioner and chief operating officer Mark Tatum, who oversees international operations, said the NBA is “reevaluating” and “considering other opportunities” for the academy program, which operates out of sports facilities run by the Chinese government. Last week, the league acknowledged for the first time it had closed the Xinjiang academy, but, when pressed, Tatum declined to say whether human rights were a factor.

“We were somewhat humbled,” Tatum said of the academy project in China. “One of the lessons that we’ve learned here is that we do need to have more direct oversight and the ability to make staffing changes when appropriate.”

In October, Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey's tweet in support of pro-democracy protesters led the Chinese government to pull the NBA from state television, costing the league hundreds of millions of dollars. The controversy continues to reverberate, as the NBA prepares to resume play this week after a 4½-month hiatus because of the coronavirus pandemic. China Central TV recently said it still won't air NBA games, and U.S. lawmakers have raised questions about the league's business ties to China.

The ESPN investigation, which began after Morey's tweet, sheds new light on the lucrative NBA-China relationship and the costs of doing business with a government that suppresses free expression and is accused of cultural genocide. It illustrates the challenges of operating in a society with markedly different approaches to issues such as discipline, education and security. The reporting is based on interviews with several former NBA employees with direct knowledge of the league's activities in China, particularly the player-development program.

The program, launched in 2016, is part of the NBA's strategy to develop local players in a basketball-obsessed market that has made NBA China a \$5 billion enterprise. Most of the former employees spoke on the condition of anonymity because they feared damaging their chances for future employment. NBA officials asked current and former employees not to speak with ESPN for this story. In an email to one former coach, a public relations official added: "Please don't mention that you have been advised by the NBA not to respond."

One American coach who worked for the NBA in China described the project as "a sweat camp for athletes."

At least two coaches left their positions in response to what they believed was mistreatment of young players.

One requested and received a transfer after watching Chinese coaches strike teenage players, three sources told ESPN. Another American coach left before the end of his contract because he found the lack of education in the academies unconscionable: "I couldn't continue to show up every day, looking at these kids and knowing they would end up being taxi drivers," he said.

Not long after the academies opened, multiple coaches complained about the physical abuse and lack of schooling to Greg Stolt, the league's vice president for international operations for NBA China, and to other league officials in China, the sources said. It was unclear whether the information was passed on to NBA officials in New York, they said. The NBA declined to make Stolt available for comment.

Two of the former NBA employees separately told ESPN that coaches at the academies regularly speculated about whether Silver had been informed about the problems. "I said, 'If [Silver] shows up, we're all fired immediately,'" one of the coaches said.

Tatum said the NBA received "a handful" of complaints that Chinese coaches had mistreated young players and immediately informed local authorities that the league had "zero tolerance" for behavior that was "antithetical to our values." Tatum said the incidents were not reported at the time to league officials in New York, including himself or Silver.

"I will tell you that the health and wellness of academy athletes and everyone who participates in our program is of the utmost priority," Tatum said.

Tatum identified four separate incidents, though he said only one was formally reported in writing by an NBA employee. On three of the occasions, the coaches reported witnessing or hearing about physical abuse. The fourth incident involved a player who suffered from heat exhaustion.

"We did everything that we could, given the limited oversight we had," Tatum said.

Three sources who worked for the NBA in China told ESPN the physical abuse by Chinese coaches was much more prevalent than the incidents Tatum identified.

The NBA brought in elite coaches and athletic trainers with experience in the G League and Division I basketball to work at the academies. One former coach described watching a Chinese coach fire a ball into a young player's face at point-blank range and then "kick him in the gut."

"Imagine you have a kid who's 13, 14 years old, and you've got a grown coach who is 40 years old hitting your kid," the coach said. "We're part of that. The NBA is part of that."

It is common for Chinese coaches to discipline players physically, according to several people with experience in player development in China. "For most of the older generation, even my grandparents, they take corporal punishment for granted and even

see it as an expression of love and care, but I know it might be criticized by people living outside of China," said Jinming Zheng, an assistant professor of sports management at Northumbria University in England, who grew up in mainland China and has written extensively about the Chinese sports system. "The older generation still sees it as an integral part of training."

In 2012, the NBA hired Bruce Palmer to work as technical director at a private basketball school in Dongguan in southern China, a program that predated the academies. The school has a sponsorship agreement that pays the NBA nearly \$200,000 a year and allows the school to bill itself as an "NBA Training Center."

Palmer spent five years in Dongguan and said he repeatedly warned Chinese coaches not to hit, kick or throw balls at children. After one incident, he said he told a coach: "You can't do that to your kid, this is an NBA training center. If you really feel like hitting a 14-year-old boy, and you think it's going to help him or make you feel better, take him off campus, but not here, because the NBA does not allow this."

Palmer said the school's headmaster told him that hitting kids has "been proven to be effective as a teaching tool."

The issue was so prevalent in the NBA academies that coaches repeatedly asked NBA China officials, including Stolt, for direction on how to handle what they saw as physical abuse, according to three sources. The coaches were told to file written reports to the NBA office in Shanghai. One coach said he encountered no more issues after filing a report, but the others said the abuse continued.

"We weren't responsible for the local coaches, we didn't have the authority," Tatum said. "We don't have oversight of the local coaches, of the academic programs or the living conditions. It's fair to say we were less involved than we wanted to be."

With a population four times the size of the U.S., China is an exploding market for the NBA. The league's soaring revenues were propelled in part by the success of former Rockets center Yao Ming, who retired in 2011.

Tatum said the league sought advice from Yao and other experts in China on the development of its academy program. He also said NBA China's board of directors was briefed on the planning and placement of the three academies, including Xinjiang, adding that ESPN holds a seat on the board. An ESPN spokesperson said the network "is a non-voting board observer and owns a small stake" in NBA China, declining any further comment. (Games are streamed in China by internet giant Tencent, which also has a partnership with ESPN.)

Launching the academies had a primary goal for NBA bosses: "Find another Yao," according to two of the former employees who spoke with ESPN.

When Silver announced the plan to open three league-run academies in China in 2016, he said the goal was to train elite athletes "holistically."

"Top international prospects will benefit from a complete approach to player development that combines NBA quality coaching, training and competition with academics and personal development," Silver said.

The league's news release announcing the academies said, "The initiative will employ a holistic, 360-degree approach to player development with focuses on education, leadership, character development and life skills."

The NBA employees who spoke with ESPN said many of the league's problems stemmed from the decision to embed the academies in government-run sports facilities. The facilities gave the NBA access to existing infra-

structure and elite players, Tatum said. But the arrangement put NBA activities under the direction of Chinese officials who selected the players and helped define the training.

"We were basically working for the Chinese government," one former coach said.

After his work in the NBA-sponsored facility in Dongguan, the league hired Palmer to evaluate the academies. He concluded the program was "fundamentally flawed." Palmer said it not only put NBA employees under Chinese authority but also prevented the league from working with China's most elite players.

In hindsight, Tatum said, the NBA might have been "a little bit naive" to believe the structure gave the league sufficient oversight.

In Xinjiang, players lived in cramped dormitories; the rooms were meant for two people, but a former coach said bunk beds were used to put as many as eight to 10 athletes in a room. Players trained two or three times a day and had few extracurricular activities. NBA coaches and officials became concerned that although education had been announced as a pillar of the academy program, the sports bureaus did not provide formal schooling. When the players—some as young as 13—weren't training, eating or sleeping, they were often left unsupervised.

One coach said league officials who visited China seemed to be caught off-guard when they learned that players in the NBA academies did not attend school.

The NBA was able to work out an arrangement by which players at the academy in Zhejiang would be educated at a local international school. But similar efforts in Xinjiang and Shandong were unsuccessful.

Tatum said Chinese officials told the NBA that players at the academies would take classes six days a week in subjects such as English, math and sports psychology. He said when NBA employees later raised questions about whether the kids were in school, the Chinese officials reassured them they were.

But two former league employees said they complained directly to Stolt, who's based in Shanghai, that the players under their supervision were not in school.

Within the past month, as the NBA prepared to resume play in Florida, it began to face new questions about its relationship with China. Sen. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., and Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., sent separate letters to Silver questioning why the NBA is promoting social justice at home while ignoring China's abuses. The letters came shortly after China announced a new national security law in Hong Kong that gives authorities sweeping powers to crack down on pro-Democracy protesters. Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, also recently sparred on Twitter with Mavericks owner Mark Cuban over China.

Hawley's letter challenged the NBA for excluding messages supporting human rights in China among statements that players can wear on their jerseys. The approved messages are limited to social justice and the Black Lives Matter movement.

"Given the NBA's troubled history of excusing and apologizing for the brutal repression of the Chinese Communist regime, these omissions are striking," Hawley wrote in the letter, which was sent to media members.

One recipient, ESPN reporter Adrian Wojnarowski, replied with a profanity, which Hawley then tweeted out to his 235,000 followers. ESPN and Wojnarowski issued separate apologies, and the reporter was suspended for two weeks without pay.

In Xinjiang, the NBA opened an academy in a region notorious for human rights abuses.

In recent years, the Chinese government has escalated its use of high-tech surveillance, restricted freedom of movement and erected mass internment facilities, which the government describes as vocational training centers and critics describe as concentration camps holding ethnic minorities, particularly Uighur Muslims. The government says the policy is necessary to combat terrorism. In September, the United States joined more than 30 countries in condemning “China’s horrific campaign of repression” against the Uighurs. Reports of separatist violence and Chinese government repression in Xinjiang go back decades.

Tatum said the NBA wasn’t aware of political tensions or human rights issues in Xinjiang when it announced it was launching the training academy there in 2016.

In the spring of 2018, the U.S. began considering sanctions against China over human rights concerns there, and the issue became the subject of increasing media coverage within the United States. In August 2018, Slate published an article under the headline: “Why is the NBA in Xinjiang? The league is running a training center in the middle of one of the world’s worst humanitarian atrocities.”

Later, the NBA would receive criticism from congressional leaders, but it never addressed the concerns or said anything about the status of the facility until last week.

Sometime shortly after Morey’s October tweet, the academy webpage was taken down.

Pressed by ESPN, Tatum repeatedly avoided questions on whether the widespread human rights abuses in Xinjiang played a role in closing the academy, instead citing “many factors.”

“My job, our job is not to take a position on every single human rights violation, and I’m not an expert in every human rights situation or violation,” Tatum said. “I’ll tell you what the NBA stands for: The values of the NBA are about respect, are about inclusion, are about diversity. That is what we stand for.”

Nury Turkel, a Uighur American activist who has been heavily involved in lobbying the U.S. government on Uighur rights, told ESPN before the NBA said it had left Xinjiang that he believed the league had been indirectly legitimizing “crimes against humanity.”

One former league employee who worked in China wondered how the NBA, which has been so progressive on issues around Black Lives Matter and moved the 2017 All-Star Game out of Charlotte, North Carolina, over a law requiring transgender people to use bathrooms corresponding to the sex listed on their birth certificates, could operate a training camp amid a Chinese government crackdown that also targeted NBA employees.

“You can’t have it both ways,” the former employee said. “. . . You can’t be over here in February promoting Black History Month and be over in China, where they’re in reeducation camps and all the people that you’re partnering with are hitting kids.”

Tatum said the NBA “has a long history and our values are about inclusion and respect and bridging cultural divides. That is what we stand for and that is who we are as an organization. We do think that engagement is the best way to bridge cultural divides, the best way to grow the game across borders.”

The repression in Xinjiang is aimed primarily at Uighurs, but foreigners also have been harassed. One American coach said he was stopped by police three times in 10 months. Once, he was taken to a station and held for more than two hours because he didn’t have his passport at the time. Because

of the security restrictions, foreigners were told they were not allowed to rent housing in Xinjiang; most lived at local hotels.

Tatum said the league wasn’t aware any of its employees had been detained or harassed in Xinjiang.

Most of the players who trained at the NBA’s Xinjiang academy were Uighurs, but it was unclear to league employees who spoke with ESPN if any were impacted by the government crackdown.

After returning from Xinjiang last fall, Corbin Loubert, a strength coach who joined the NBA after stints at the IMG Academy in Florida and The Citadel, posted a CNN story on Twitter describing how the network’s reporters faced surveillance and intimidation in Xinjiang.

“I spent the past year living in Xinjiang, and can confirm every word of this piece is true,” Loubert tweeted. “One of the biggest challenges was not only the discrimination and harassment I faced,” he added, “but turning a blind eye to the discrimination and harassment that the Uyghur people around me faced.”

Loubert declined several interview requests from ESPN.

In a bipartisan letter to Silver last October after Morey’s tweet, eight U.S. legislators—including Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., and Cruz—called for the NBA to “re-evaluate” the Xinjiang academy in response to “a massive, government-run campaign of ethno-religious repression.”

Even though the NBA now says it had left Xinjiang in the spring of 2019, the league did not respond to the letter. The Xinjiang academy webpage disappeared soon after.

Last week, in response to Sen. Blackburn of Tennessee, the league wrote, “The NBA has had no involvement with the Xinjiang basketball academy for more than a year, and the relationship has been terminated.”

John Pomfret, whose 2016 book, “The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom” covers the history of the U.S.-China relationship, called the decision to put an academy in Xinjiang “a huge mistake” that made the NBA “party to a massive human rights violation.”

“Shutting it down was probably the smartest thing to do,” he said. “But you can clearly understand from the NBA’s point of view why they wouldn’t want to make an announcement: Then you’re just rubbing China’s nose in it. What would you say, ‘We’re leaving because of human rights concerns?’ That’s worse than Morey’s tweet.”

Tatum said the league decided to end its involvement with the Xinjiang facility because it “didn’t have the authority, or the ability to take direct action against any of these local coaches, and we ultimately concluded that the program there was unsalvageable.”

Tatum said the NBA informed its coaches in Xinjiang that the league planned to cease operations, and coaches were then “moved out.” But when Tatum was told that multiple sources had told ESPN that the NBA never informed the coaches of its plans to close Xinjiang, Tatum said he wasn’t actually sure what conversations had taken place.

Two sources disputed that the NBA had any plans to leave Xinjiang in the spring of 2019. One coach said the league was still seeking other coaches to move there well into the summer and that the league’s statement to Blackburn was “completely inaccurate.”

“They were still trying to get people to go out there,” the coach said. “It didn’t end because [Tatum] said, ‘We’re gonna end this.’”

“They probably finally said, ‘Why are we doing this?’” he continued. “Like we told them from the start, ‘Why do we need to be

here? We’re the NBA, there’s no reasons for us to be here.”

Mrs. BLACKBURN. I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF MARK WESLEY MENEZES

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I have come to the floor this afternoon to encourage Senators to support the nomination that is now pending before us. This is for Mark Menezes to be the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Energy.

I have had plenty of opportunity to be working with Mr. Menezes, as he has been with the Department of Energy for quite some time.

He originally hails from Louisiana. He earned his undergraduate and law degrees at Louisiana State University. He has, as I mentioned, considerable experience in the energy sector and here on Capitol Hill. He previously served as chief counsel for energy and environment on the House Energy and Commerce Committee. So he has been around for a fair period of time.

But more recently, for the past 3 years now, Mr. Menezes has served as the Department’s Under Secretary of Energy, and in that role, he has been responsible for many programs that help drive the innovation within the Department, including for renewable energy, as well as nuclear energy.

Mr. Menezes also helped create the Department’s cybersecurity office, which is dedicated to protecting our energy infrastructure from what has become very sophisticated and near-constant threats.

As Members may recall, the Senate confirmed Mr. Menezes to his current role by voice vote. I believe he has excelled as the Under Secretary of Energy. He has helped to set the policy direction of the Department. He has worked with many of us on issues that are important to our States and to the country as a whole.

I am also confident that Mr. Menezes will be a great second-in-command for Secretary Brouillette. We held Mr. Menezes’s nomination hearing back on May 20. This was our first hearing that we had held after several months lost due to the pandemic.

Mr. Menezes did, not surprisingly, very, very well. He demonstrated his knowledge of the issues; he showed us that he understands what it takes to help lead the Department; and that enabled us to report his nomination to the full Senate with overwhelming bipartisan support.

So we are sitting here now—it has been nearly a 2-month delay—and I am very pleased that we are about to vote on Mr. Menezes’s nomination. It is really key. It is very important that