



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on September 26, 2018

## Chinese Communist Propaganda Piece in Iowa Paper Could Backfire

David Skidmore, a political science professor at Drake University, took one look at the propaganda piece inserted into Sunday's edition of the *Des Moines Register* [and said](#) the effort by the Chinese communist government to sway Iowa soybean and sorghum farmers in the November midterm elections "could backfire," adding that readers of the piece "may not appreciate trying to be manipulated by a foreign government."



The insert, a four-page supplement to Sunday's edition, "was paid for and prepared solely by *China Daily*, an official publication of the People's Republic of China," according to a statement printed at the top of the first page under the "CHINAWATCH" banner. (To see a PDF of the supplement, [click here](#).) It was a clumsy and transparent effort to look legitimate, appearing just days after the Chinese government called off trade talks with the Trump administration and one day before new tariffs would be applied to another \$200 billion of Chinese imports.

Skidmore saw through the ruse, adding that the insert was meant to "maximize pressure on the [Trump] administration to change its trade policies toward China by attempting to show [the] White House and Republicans that they're going to pay a price [in] the midterms."

Kirk Leeds, who heads up the Iowa Soybean Association, said the Chinese government is "very aware of where the red and blue states are" and Iowa, like other Ag strongholds, went strongly for Trump in 2016. Leeds said the supplement reflects the communist government's belief that if they can weaken Trump support in the House in the midterms he'll be easier to negotiate with afterwards.

But Leeds doubted the four-page supplement would have much of an impact: "I doubt farmers or many Iowans will be swayed" by it, he said. People will instead see immediately that "China is trying to send a political signal."

Despite the fact that the supplement was identified as originating from an official mouthpiece of a communist regime, casual readers could be forgiven if they mistook it for another four pages of news reporting, since the supplement, comprised of various standard-size newspaper "stories," much more closely resembles news copy than advertising matter. The supplement's lead story on the right-hand side tells readers about a China-bound ship that intended to get its cargo of soybeans to its destination prior to the imposition of Trump's new tariffs. But the ship arrived a day later than intended, costing the American exporter some \$6 million extra that he had hoped to avoid.

But the Chinese writers of the piece had trouble with American English. For example, here is one paragraph from the piece that mangled its message:

China is the world's largest soybean exporter and about 60 percent of U.S. soybean exports go to the country. The trade dispute has forced more Chinese importers in South America, including



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Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay.

This of course is completely nonsensical. That paragraph should have read:

China is the world's largest soybean importer and about 60 percent of U.S. soybeans go to the country. The trade dispute has forced more Chinese importers to [shift their purchases from the United States to] exporters in South America, including Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay.

But perhaps the kiss of death is where the propaganda piece appeared. The *Des Moines Register* supported Hillary in 2016, and was more than willing to accept a piece like this from the same Chinese communist-controlled paper that often places similar screeds in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

The piece also failed to impress Dave McNeer, who runs Maxim Advertising in Newton, Iowa. McNeer, who served as Trump's merchandising professional in 2016, shrugged off the effort by the paper to sway public opinion against President Trump and his trade strategies with the Chinese. Said McNeer, "I tend to look at those types of ads as just what they are ... an advertisement..."

Soybean farmer Grant Kimberley, who also serves as the director of market development for the Iowa Soybean Association, saw through the sham immediately as well: "I thought: Hmmm, that's not subtle. They're certainly trying to influence people." But he added, "I think ultimately people have their minds kind of made up, whether it's on one side of [the issue] or the other."

Because of its source, the reputation of the *Register* as a blue paper in a dark red state, and its clumsy attempt to sway readers away from Trump and his trade strategy with China, the four-page propaganda piece is being recognized for what it is, and will likely have negligible impact on the sensible people of Iowa who happened to stumble over the piece on Sunday.

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