



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on March 3, 2023

Semafor Wants to Restore “Trust” in News. But Does It Serve China?

Would you trust the wolf to secure the hen house? One well-funded startup claiming to want to restore Americans’ “trust” in news has all the hallmarks of being little more than another wolf in sheep’s clothing.

Semafor claims it wants to change the media landscape. Despite just getting its start in 2022, the news website has already made waves.

In part, this is due to the outlet having some big names behind it. The founders are Ben Smith, the former *New York Times* columnist and editor-in-chief of BuzzFeed News, and Justin B. Smith (no relation), the former CEO of Bloomberg Media Group.

And Semafor also has some big money behind it. At its launch, it had at least [\\$25 million](#) from investors such as journalist Jessica Lessin and publisher David Bradley, co-owner of *The Atlantic*.



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You may be asking yourself why anyone would be interested in starting, funding, or reading yet another establishment talking-point-pushing news website when that market is already saturated.

The answer: Beijing has more inroads to make in order to dominate the American news cycle, and setting up a new media outlet that specifically works to make Communist China look good is necessary to advancing that goal.

As the [Washington Free Beacon](#) points out in a new report, Semafor is partnering with several pro-China entities, from Chinese Communist Party front groups to China-friendly business leaders to a “chamber of commerce led by the Communist Party of China.”

Thus, while Semafor claims to be “addressing the crisis of trust in news,” it is, in fact, nothing more than a CCP propaganda outlet — part of China’s fifth column working assiduously on its behalf here in the United States.

The China connection can clearly be seen in the outlet’s partnering with the Center for China & Globalization on a “China and Global Business” initiative scheduled to launch in Beijing later this year.

This initiative will gather both Chinese and American citizens known to be soft on Beijing. For example, one slated attendee is John Thornton, a big donor to the Brookings Institute known for his ties to Chinese government officials.

Ben Smith [says](#) Semafor is merely trying to counterbalance “hawkish” American views on China. This is why, he contends, he has put together an “advisory board” for Semafor’s China initiative who can



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collectively provide a “diversity of opinion.”

But is it really “diversity” if they all think the same? In this case, if they’re all China fanatics?

The Free Beacon details some of the China faithful found on the advisory board:

Advisory board member Wang Huiyao, the founder of the Center for China & Globalization, is a Chinese government adviser and official at organizations that helped develop China’s controversial “Thousand Talents” program, which the FBI says Beijing uses to steal trade secrets from American companies and create national security risks for the U.S. government.

Chen Deming, a former Chinese minister of commerce and advisory board member, has been a Chinese Communist Party member since 1974. Another adviser is former Chinese ambassador Cui Tiankai, who in that diplomatic role has defended Beijing’s human rights record. In 2018, he dismissed concerns about China’s oppression of Muslim Uyghurs, saying that China was merely “trying to reeducate most of them, trying to turn them into normal persons [who] can go back to normal life.”

One of the American members of the advisory board is Jessica Chan Weiss, a former Biden State Department official who has blasted America’s “obsession” with China. She even [argued](#) that the threat posed by the Chinese spy balloon last month was “blown wildly out of proportion.”

Moreover, the Center for China & Globalization with which Semafor is partnering is itself part of China’s United Front, which, as *The New American* has [previously reported](#), is an initiative to “co-opt and neutralize sources of potential opposition” and encourage foreign actors to “adopt positions supportive of Beijing’s preferred policies.”

Another outlet that has the United Front’s fingerprints all over it is PolitiFact. Its founder, Bill Adair, [was “journalist in residence”](#) in 2012 for the U.S.-China Education Trust (USCET), which hosts journalism programs aimed at advising Chinese Communist Party-run media outlets and journalism schools.

USCET is part of China’s United Front effort.

That Semafor is cut from the same Chinese cloth is apparent from nothing more than a casual glance at the outlet’s homepage, which, at the time of this article’s writing, has numerous China stories as its top headlines, including one [touting China’s contributions](#) to artificial intelligence and another [critiquing Republicans](#) at the 2023 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) for making China the “new big bad.”

“The Republicans shuttling between National Harbor and the Hill might not go that far,” writes Semafor’s David Weigel. “But they were speaking to a base that saw China’s hand in everything from COVID-era school closures to TikTok-driven mental illness — and, as several legislators said, literally saw China’s spying eye when they looked skyward.”

One might add that there’s another place you can turn to see China’s hand: Semafor.

To Beijing’s credit, they have been highly successful in gaining a presence in nearly every channel of influence in America. The media is no exception.



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