

The **UNITED STATES SENATE**
COMMITTEE *on* **FINANCE**
CHAIRMAN RON **WYDEN**, D-OREGON

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Contact: [Keith Chu](#) (202) 224-4515

Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Hearing on Forced Labor
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The United States is a country with a lot of economic and political muscle. The country should use that muscle to fight for American jobs and workers. It should also use it, whenever possible, to improve the lives of powerless people around the world. It's not every day you have an opportunity to talk about accomplishing both of those goals at once. Today is one of those days, with the Finance Committee meeting to discuss stamping out forced labor – modern day slavery – around the globe.

It takes hard work, even in 2021, to live up to a moral standard that says the U.S. will not profit from slave labor. It still goes on in many places around the world, including in places that are part of our global supply chains. But that hard work to fight forced labor is absolutely essential.

Our government needs to use every available tool to root out the practice of forced labor and address its causes, whether it's through diplomacy, by alleviating poverty, sanctions or any other means. Within the jurisdiction of the Finance Committee, the government needs to use every tool in the trade policy tool kit to keep forced labor products out of our market.

The federal ban on imports made with forced labor dates back to 1930. It's known in the trade policy world as Section 307. It gives Customs the authority to stop products made with forced labor. However, a loophole in that federal ban that applied to products that aren't made within the U.S. persisted for decades. Senator Brown and I wrote an amendment that closed that forced labor loophole in 2016. Since then, enforcement actions have increased, but so have glaring examples of the scourge of forced labor, most notably in China.

Two U.S. administrations have now concluded that what the Chinese government is doing to the Uyghur people in the Xinjiang region in Western China constitutes genocide.

The Chinese government and Chinese companies are using forced labor from that region to produce a variety of products. For example, the U.S. took action to block the import of cotton and tomatoes picked by slave labor in Xinjiang. The Finance Committee will hear today from Joseph Wrona, whose good-paying union job in the production of silicon metal was shut down in part due to forced labor competition from China.

Forced labor is a problem in other countries, too, including in India, Burma and Malaysia. Senator Brown and I have pushed for U.S. trade enforcers to look at taking action against the import of mica, palm oil and cocoa produced with forced labor.

Bottom line, the continued existence of forced labor in 2021 is a morally repugnant scourge, and when American workers have to compete with forced labor, everybody loses. I'm interested in making sure CBP has the tools and resources it needs to step up enforcement. There is also bipartisan interest in creating effective new standards and new enforcement tools to support this effort.

Ending forced labor is morally just. Raising the bar for labor standards around the world also helps to protect high-skill, high-wage jobs here in the United States. So this is a vitally important hearing. I want to thank the witness panel for joining the committee today, and I am looking forward to our discussion.

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