

BILL PASCRELL, JR.
9TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY



COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRADE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY

DEMOCRATIC STEERING AND POLICY COMMITTEE

2409 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-5751
(202) 225-5782 FAX

ROBERT A. ROE FEDERAL BUILDING
200 FEDERAL PLAZA, SUITE 500
PATERSON, NJ 07505
(973) 523-5152
(973) 523-0637 FAX

<http://pascrell.house.gov>
bill.pascrell@mail.house.gov

Congress of the United States House of Representatives

October 7, 2019

Mr. Adam Silver
Commissioner
National Basketball Association
645 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10022

Dear Commissioner Silver:

I write to you with urgency after seeing your comments, and the statements of your league and several of its owners in reaction to Houston Rockets' General Manager Daryl Morey's publicly-expressed personal support of peaceful protestors in Hong Kong. Your league's collective responses are shameful and, without corrective action will mark a permanent stain on the National Basketball Association.

If you have not had the opportunity to follow the events currently occurring in Hong Kong, they are of momentous importance. Hundreds of thousands of residents of that vibrant region are demanding the ability to live free from the cold hand of tyranny. For their pursuit of human dignity, they are facing violent crackdown by the Chinese Communist Party, which is bringing to bare the cold instruments of the most brutal authoritarian regime on earth. These brave women and men, young and old, are demonstrating undaunted daily courage that is inspiring the whole world.

Recorded footage of the demonstrators has shown United States flags and other American symbols that illustrate our nation's influence on their noble undertaking. We must take our own inspiration to them as a sacred responsibility. Our nation's support of the demonstrators is especially important as our current chief executive and chief diplomat remain cowardly silent to the Chinese Communist Party's violent crackdown.

In a statement, your league asserts that Mr. Morey's support of the Hong Kong demonstrators has "deeply offended," which your league labels "regrettable." The only matter that is offensive and regrettable in this affair that I can discern is the ignorance of your office. Your league's statement further asserts that "the values of the league support individuals' education themselves and sharing their views on matters important to them." This claim smacks of an Orwellian cravenness that, like the silence of our current chief executive and chief diplomat, will only embolden the authoritarian Chinese Communist Party and set back the cause of liberty. Furthermore, piggybacking off harsh statements by Rockets team owner Tilman Fertitta, there are reports Mr. Morey may soon be forced from his position. This would be an outrage.

Your league and its leadership should appreciate that the demand for freedom, liberty, and human dignity Mr. Morey praised embodies the very same inspiration that drove the women and men who founded our own nation. Our Founders' successful pursuit midwived a government that allows for the free expression and capitalist growth of enterprises like the National Basketball Association.

No one could question that even as our democracy has flourished for now 243 years, it is not free of imperfections that hinder our ability to lecture others on democratic designs. For example, it is our sometimes-flawed system that allows professional sports leagues to reap billions of dollars in taxpayer-funded incentives for new arenas owned and operated solely by tiny groups of team owners. Nevertheless, it is the duty of our elected leaders and our most prominent corporate citizens to be advocates of democracy to fledgling satellites across the globe. With democracy under threat in Hong Kong, throughout Europe, and even here in America, our ability to stand for our values will have a direct impact on the preservation of freedom. A citizen of America, the NBA cannot divorce itself from that burden.

Can you assure our nation that your league, its officials, partners, and sponsors will take no punitive actions against Mr. Morey? Can you state unequivocally that your league, its officials, partners, and sponsors support the freedom of democratic protestors in all nations and oppose autocracy in all forms? Will you retract your statement and admonish Mr. Feritta's response to Mr. Morey's personal support of the Hong Kong democracy demonstrators and the negative responses of any of your other team owners?

The NBA and its players are ambassadors of joy that have thrilled billions and inspired generations of young students to perfect their abilities and pursue their dreams. You have largely balanced that charge with incredible growth in the U.S. and abroad that is one of America's great business success stories. The NBA and its owners must ask yourselves if your corporate profits are of greater importance than the ideals of liberty that comprise the bedrock of America. At some point soon your league and its leaders may have to pick one or the other, but you can't have both.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Pascrell, Jr." with a stylized, flowing script.

Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress