

# [***'Very Disappointed': Local Residents Furious Over China-Linked Battery Maker's 'Strange' Town Hall***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BS4-45R1-DXXD-7005-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

[*Link to Image*](https://cdn01.dailycaller.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Screen-Shot-2024-04-09-at-3.14.26-PM-e1712691211611.png)

Residents of a rural Michigan community are not satisfied with a Monday virtual town hall meeting hosted by a Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-linked battery company, saying that the meeting did not provide answers to key questions about the firm's plans to operate.

Chuck Thelen, the vice president of North American manufacturing for Gotion Inc., answered questions from residents and explained his company's plans during the meeting in a bid to counter “misinformation” about the company's extensively-reported ties to the CCP via its parent company, Gotion High-Tech. While Thelen characterized the meeting as an attempt at transparency, some locals and participants told the Daily Caller News Foundation that they are not satisfied with the answers provided and that major questions remain about the company and its ties to China.

Gotion Inc. is a subsidiary “[*wholly owned and controlled*](https://efile.fara.gov/docs/7261-Exhibit-AB-20230421-1.pdf)” by the China-based Gotion High-Tech, a company that employed [*more than 900 CCP members*](https://dailycaller.com/2023/08/31/gotion-ccp-michigan-battery-plant/) as of 2022, including CEO Li Zhen. The DCNF has extensively reported on Gotion High-Tech's considerable ties to the CCP: a traveling delegation of CCP officials [*established*](https://dailycaller.com/2023/09/12/ccp-gotion-officials-electric-vehicles/) a so-called talent recruitment “work station” at Gotion Inc.'s California headquarters in 2017, a top executive was pictured [*attending*](https://dailycaller.com/2024/04/05/exclusive-exec-at-us-battery-manufacturer-pictured-at-chinese-communist-party-meetings/) at least two meetings of Gotion High-Tech's internal CCP committee in 2022 and unearthed [*video footage*](https://dailycaller.com/2023/08/31/gotion-ccp-red-army-ev-batteries/) shows Gotion High-Tech employees dressed as Red Army soldiers and pledging allegiance to the CCP while on a company excursion.

Gotion Inc.'s plans to build a subsidized facility in the Big Rapids, Michigan, area have become a major flash point in the region's local ***politics***, as numerous local officials who supported the company's presence were [*rejected*](https://dailycaller.com/2023/11/08/gotion-michigan-ccp-board-voters/) by voters in November 2023 and replaced by officials who largely oppose the company.

“I asked a very fair question respectfully submitted regarding the national security experts who have testified that they are certain that if the plant is built here in Mecosta County, it will be used to attack our cyber security and our intellectual property. I also asked a second question regarding the affiliation between Gotion, Inc. and Gotion High-Tech,” Bruce Borkovich, the deputy supervisor of the Big Rapids Charter Township and a participant in the meeting, told the DCNF. “Both questions were respectfully submitted, and neither question was asked - this is further evidence that Mr. Thelen is more concerned with his bonus than he is with being honest with the residents of Mecosta County. I am very disappointed that this was not an honest forum to ask tough questions.” [***(RELATED: 'We Refuse To Be Bullied': Rural Officials Throw Wrench In China-Tied Company's Plans To Build Battery Plant)***](https://dailycaller.com/2024/03/16/we-refuse-to-be-bullied-rural-officials-throw-wrench-in-china-tied-companys-plans-to-build-battery-plant/)

To recruit for Anhui & the Hefei Comprehensive National Science Center, the [*#CCP*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/CCP?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) hired w/ Thousand Talents Plan contracts & set up “Overseas Talent Work Stations” - including one within [*@Gotion48660*](https://twitter.com/Gotion48660?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)'s CALIFORNIA HQ[*@DailyCaller*](https://twitter.com/DailyCaller?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*@inamitchellfilm*](https://twitter.com/inamitchellfilm?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*https://t.co/7WmoemHVag*](https://t.co/7WmoemHVag)

- Philip Lenczycki 蔡岳 (@LenczyckiPhilip) [*September 12, 2023*](https://twitter.com/LenczyckiPhilip/status/1701585158674292941?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Former CIA Director Leon Panetta [*testified*](https://dailycaller.com/2024/01/31/panetta-cia-chief-china-battery-factories-spy-gotion/) to Congress in January that there is a strong possibility that the CCP uses Gotion Inc.'s planned facility “to gain the kind of advantages that they want that are counter, frankly, to the interests of the United States.”

“It was just what we expected. Continued lies and rhetoric, along with the convenience of no feedback, therefore no accountability,” Teri Hook, a local who attended the remote meeting and a member of the anti-Gotion Mecosta Environmental and Security Alliance (MESA), told the DCNF. “The truth will eventually prevail, though. We're not concerned.”

Penny Currie, the treasurer for Big Rapids Township, expressed similar sentiments.

“I found the 'Chat with Chuck' forum to be entirely lacking the information citizens in Mecosta County have demanded to know for years and still don't have,” Currie told the DCNF. “It was a strange format, and was very strictly vetted. Any answers provided were either incomplete or lacking any real substance.”

Thelen said that he intends to host more virtual town halls in the future, about once every month or so. The recording of Monday's meeting will eventually be uploaded to a website that currently does not exist, he added.

Thelen was generally dismissive of two questions pertaining to Gotion Inc.'s China links, both of which referenced DCNF reporting that Thelen appeared to characterize as “tabloid” journalism. Throughout the meeting, Thelen suggested that concerns about the company's connections to the CCP are based in [*xenophobia*](https://dailycaller.com/2023/09/22/jb-pritzker-office-gotion-chinese-communist-party-linked-battery-firm-xenophobia/), a coordinated campaign to scapegoat his firm or are being driven by people who identify with extreme political groups.

Other questions pertained to potential environmental impacts of Gotion Inc.'s planned facility in the area, its corporate citizenship and the permitting process. The meeting's structure required participants to submit questions to a moderator, who would then pick which questions to ask Thelen before publishing them in the meeting's chat.

Some residents told the DCNF that the format allowed Thelen to not fully engage with the tougher questions that he did field, adding to their frustrations. Notably, the facility that Gotion Inc. plans to build in Michigan is poised to benefit from generous government subsidies, as is another development it plans to build in [*Manteno, Illinois*](https://dailycaller.com/2023/09/21/locals-outraged-secretive-battery-firm-gotion/).

“A [Foreign Agent Registration Act] registration filed with the [Department of Justice] on April 21, 2023 says that Gotion Inc. is 'wholly owned and controlled' by Gotion High-Tech, which employed hundreds of CCP members as of 2022 and set up a 'talent recruitment station' established by a visiting CCP delegation at the California HQ in 2017,” the DCNF wrote in a submitted question, referencing numerous past investigations into the firm and its China ties. “You have previously suggested to the press that the CCP has zero presence in the American company. Do you dispute any of these points? If so, which one? If you do not dispute any of those points, can you explain how the CCP has no presence in the American company?”

Thelen effectively dismissed the question, appearing to lump together some of the DCNF's detailed reporting with baseless claims that have been made about the company and its planned Michigan facility.

“So the recruitment and the whole CCP topic. Let me just draw a parallel. I've heard about, I've read things that we're gonna put a secret police station. Why our buildings are so tall so they can hold missiles, blah, blah, blah. This is all conjecture. And this is really intended to scare people,” Thelen said in response to the question, which the event's moderator summarized for him. ” If you look at the state of Michigan, there are 269 companies at last count, according to MEDC, that are already in the state of Michigan that had Chinese links, Chinese company links, not the PRC, Chinese company links.”

“I haven't seen any kind of claim of any kind of police station. I haven't seen any kind of claim of CCP parties that has been defined. I don't see any claim about a PRC infiltration. So I just wonder why people want to single out Gotion instead of these other companies,” he continued. “There's something behind this. Something made someone decide Gotion is a scapegoat when we have very similar business practices to many companies here. So I don't know where all that comes from. Now, there's no recruitment of CCP members. No, there's no police station. There's nothing I've ever heard of. And as we see these new congressional hearings that are going to be coming up, if I'm asked to testify will do so I have nothing to hide. I expect to be asked to testify, frankly. There's a lot of xenophobia is going on here.” [***(RELATED: GOP Lawmakers Demand Treasury Department Investigate 'CCP-Affiliated' Firm Building Battery Plants Across US)***](https://dailycaller.com/2023/09/20/gop-ccp-battery-plants-cfius/)

Gotion Inc.'s chief tech officer Steven Cai was there when the Anhui CCP official set up an Overseas Chinese Work Station in [*@Gotion48660*](https://twitter.com/Gotion48660?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)'s Cali HQ to “carry out Anhui province's talent recruitment work” in June 2017.

See [*@DailyCaller*](https://twitter.com/DailyCaller?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)'s report for more:[*https://t.co/7WmoemHnkI*](https://t.co/7WmoemHnkI) [*pic.twitter.com/5xAEK3m4my*](https://t.co/5xAEK3m4my)

- Philip Lenczycki 蔡岳 (@LenczyckiPhilip) [*April 7, 2024*](https://twitter.com/LenczyckiPhilip/status/1776762635049939354?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Carman Bean, who serves as a supervisor for the Big Rapids Charter Township, echoed Borkovich's criticisms about the lack of actual transparency provided during a meeting nominally focused on being transparent.

“I found it simply incredulous that Mr. Thelen chose to utter the word 'transparency!'” Bean told the DCNF.

The DCNF has reported extensively on Gotion Inc.'s connections to the CCP via Gotion High-Tech.

A senior Gotion executive, Steven Cai, attended at least two meetings hosted by Gotion High-Tech's internal CCP committee in 2022, the DCNF recently [*reported*](https://dailycaller.com/2024/04/05/exclusive-exec-at-us-battery-manufacturer-pictured-at-chinese-communist-party-meetings/). John Whetstone, a public relations professional who moderated the forum, told the DCNF on Tuesday that its reporting on Cai was “fake news” despite the fact that much of the source material cited in that story came from Gotion High-Tech's website.

“By the way, CCP, it's a political party, like Republican or Democrat,” Thelen also said during the town hall meeting. Whetstone did not respond immediately to a request to clarify this statement or confirm if it is the sincere view of Thelen that the CCP is like American political parties.

Gotion High-Tech has also participated in two CCP programs known to the U.S. government and national security experts to advance research and development efforts that benefit the Chinese military, and a joint venture involving the firm contracted with a U.S.-blacklisted Chinese paramilitary organization, [*other*](https://dailycaller.com/2024/01/16/gotion-china-programs-acquire-tech-ccp-military/) [*investigations*](https://dailycaller.com/2023/10/30/gotion-china-blacklisted-ccp-group/) discovered.

“As was the case with the first online town hall forum with the People's Republic of China (PRC)-based and CCP-tied Gotion nearly one year ago to the day, this was a highly structured and controlled format. Serious questions surrounding this 'deal' remain and continue to go unanswered,” Joseph Cella, a former U.S. ambassador and co-founder of the Michigan-China Economic Security Review Group, told the DCNF. “It is very surprising Governor Gretchen Whitmer, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), The Right Place and Ferris State University having lobbied to secure nearly a billion Michigan taxpayer dollars for this 'deal' would permit such a venue as a forum to defend their transaction. It may be because they are now distancing themselves from the 'deal' as it was hastily concocted and now might collapse.”

Gotion Inc. and Gotion High-Tech did not respond immediately to requests for comment.

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**Graphic**

A yard sign in the Big Rapids, Michigan area expresses opposition to Gotion Inc. (YouTube / Screenshot / Public - User: WOOD TV8)

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