

## Former Wyo. government employees team up to facilitate PPE donation from China

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### Body

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#### At a glance

Former state Rep. Bryan Pedersen of Cheyenne is working with local attorney Nathan Nicholas to import a donation of personal protective equipment from a province in China. Pedersen has two adopted children from China, and he hopes this effort is an example for them and the community.

CHEYENNE - Former state legislator Bryan Pedersen hasn't heard any insensitive remarks made toward his two adopted Chinese children - Ea, 11, and Brant, 5 - but he worries that might change when the COVID-19 pandemic lifts and they go back to school.

That's why, when local attorney Nathan Nicholas asked if Pedersen wanted to work on a project with the Chinese province of Shaanxi to get a donation of PPE to Wyoming, he eagerly jumped onboard.

"I hope my kids see this is as an example of how to step up and help their community throughout their lives," said Pedersen, who also has two biological children. "And if there is one less person who looks at my (Chinese-American) kids and starts talking about the Wuhan flu, then this was worth it."

The roots of this partnership with China date back to June 2012 when, according to a [\\_5d8a3f48-7292-5c04-b46b-93b1948f9b37.html" target="\\_blank">report](#) by the Gillette News Record, Gillette Mayor Tom Murphy signed an agreement to form a sister-city with Yulin, a city in the Shaanxi province.

Murphy had recently returned from the International Advanced Coal Technology Conference in China, where he had set out to develop a relationship with representatives from Shaanxi, China's largest coal-producing region (a 2019 National Geographic article described the importance of coal in the province as such: "What West Virginia is to the United States, Shaanxi Province is to China.")

Nicholas said that's when an energy research triad was formed between Wyoming, Shaanxi and Queensland, Australia, the region (equal with New South Wales) with the of Australia's total black coal resources. Nicholas, who speaks Mandarin and whose mother is Chinese, became a policy adviser to then-Gov. Matthew Mead shortly after the trio of countries began working together.

While working for Gov. Mead, Nicholas utilized connections he already had in China through his at Wolf Robotics to help the governor further develop this energy-based relationship with China.

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"It started in Gillette, but was nurtured and expanded under Gov. Mead," Nicholas said.

These combined experiences are why, when some of his old colleagues in Shaanxi province wanted to find a way to help Wyomingites battle the novel coronavirus in early March, they turned to Nicholas to help make it happen.

"They said, 'Let me see if I can help. We have a surplus of supplies now that our demand is waning,' and then they said they wanted to make a donation of PPE," Nicholas said. "Since I have the import/export experience, I just kind of took it with Bryan, and he ran with it."

The result is a donation of 10,000 surgical masks, 300 face shields and 300 protective suits from the People's Government of Shaanxi that's currently sitting in Beijing, waiting to be shipped to Denver - Nicholas said he's working with the Denver Port Authority to clear it through customs as quickly as possible - before it's brought up to Cheyenne by car.

Pedersen and Nicholas teamed up with state Sen. Chris Rothfuss, D-Laramie, on logistics, and after reaching out to Lynn Budd, director of the Wyoming Office of Homeland Security, they were able to get the green light for that department to help with distribution of the donation once it makes its way to Wyoming.

"We were able to say, 'Look, we'll take this on, will you write us the letter of acceptance so it's official, and we'll take it directly to Homeland Security when it gets here?'" Pedersen said. "How do we distribute it all across the state in an equal way? This was our opportunity to have (the Wyoming Office of Homeland Security) do it because they know where the need is based on population and impact."

The plan, then, is for Pedersen and Nicholas to ensure the donation arrives in Wyoming safely, then go to Homeland Security to get the directive for where they need to take the items next.

The mission is personal for both Pedersen and Nicholas due to their family ties to China, and they agree that in the current political climate, it's hard for many Americans to remember that the Chinese are simply humans like the rest of us - and they shouldn't be blamed for their government's decisions.

"My daughter is from Wuhan, and I don't want her to go to school and have someone tell her this (pandemic) is her fault," Pedersen said. "Hopefully people will see that these are good Chinese people connecting with good people from Wyoming, and that will help with any sentiment against Asian Americans."

In order to make the donation possible, Nicholas and Pedersen formed a nonprofit called the Wyoming Shaanxi Foundation that became the importing entity. Nicholas hopes the foundation will eventually help improve Wyoming's relations with China on an even larger scale. But for now, they'll focus on getting as much PPE to the state as they can.

"The long-term intent is to help expand this relationship into other products, if Wyoming companies want to import from or export to China because we have the contacts to do that," Pedersen said. "If there is a long-term need for PPE, we might start setting up a GoFundMe and other fundraising mechanisms so we can keep importing PPE. ... As long as there's a service we can provide, we'll continue to try to do so."

Nicholas said the future of Chinese-American relations is uncertain, but one thing he wants people to remember is that often what Americans see in the news is through the filter of the Communist Party of China, not China's everyday citizens.

"The Chinese people are good people, and there's a certain amount of angst and regret that they feel, some sort of culpability, and they want to help," Nicholas said. "So we should accept that help and close the gap. Let governments do what governments do, but that person-to-person connection is there, and we should nurture it."

## Graphic

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## Former Wyo. government employees team up to facilitate PPE donation from China

The Pedersen family, from left, Ea, 11; Sara; Brant, 5; Dane, 13; Bryan; and Brock, 14, pose for a photo outside their home Friday, May 8, 2020, in Cheyenne. Bryan Pedersen recently helped facilitate a donation of 10,000 surgical masks, 300 face shields and 300 protective suits from the People's Government of Shaanxi in China to Wyoming. Michael Cummo/Wyoming Tribune Eagle

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