

Disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have stoked long-simmering concerns about foreign investment in U.S. agriculture and triggered action last week by U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe and 3rd District Congressman Frank Lucas. Inhofe and Lucas co-sponsored companion legislation that would increase oversight of such interests by adding the agriculture secretary to the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, foreign interests own U.S. farmland equivalent in size to the state of Ohio. Beyond that, they own or control companies that make agricultural chemicals and process food products. Oklahoma forbids most foreign ownership of agricultural land, but there is an exception for confined feeding operations and dairies. There is also an exception for forestry. “This legislation works to ensure that foreign investment in our nation’s agricultural sector is given the appropriate amount of scrutiny needed to protect and maintain our national security,” Lucas said in a press release. “The American people have seen firsthand how great the need for increased oversight of foreign investment in our nation’s food supply chain is during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Unrest: U.S. Sen. James Lankford criticized China and its handling of protests in Hong Kong but defended the Trump administration’s use of unidentified federal forces in Portland and other cities. In a floor speech Wednesday, Lankford said that while the world has been distracted by COVID-19, China has moved into countries around the world and in some cases essentially taken control of their ports and other assets. This includes Hong Kong, a former British colony that has operated for more than 20 years as a semi-autonomous part of China. “The communist government has moved into Hong Kong and has taken it over,” Lankford said. “They ... declared (to) Hong Kong that you can’t have anything of what they call subversion, organization and perpetuation of what they call terroristic activities ... This new security law was delivered to the people of Hong Kong at midnight and went into place immediately. The next step was Chinese communist police, military law enforcement moved into Hong Kong to begin to implement this.” In a Facebook post the same day, Lankford said the Trump administration was justified

in deploying federal agents without identification in unmarked vehicles on the streets of Portland and now elsewhere. Lankford cited protection of Portland's federal courthouse and the safety of the agents, who reportedly are with the Department of Homeland Security. "I've spoken to the leaders at DHS & the media's account of what is happening is skewed, to say the least," Lankford wrote. "They are using unmarked vehicles because rioters are lighting them on fire. They aren't wearing name badges because rioters are targeting their families." Nightly protests have continued in Portland for almost two months, and while most are described as peaceful there have been conflicts with law enforcement. On at least one occasion fireworks were launched at the federal courthouse. Video shows men in military gear without identification taking people off the streets and putting them into unmarked vans. Reporters and photographers say they have had guns pointed at them by government agents and at least one observer was punched in the face. Skeptics say the administration is trying to provoke a violent reaction. "Authoritarian governments, not democratic republics, send unmarked authorities after protesters," Lankford's colleague, Oregon Democrat Jeff Merkley, said earlier in the week. Lankford's Facebook post had attracted 2,800 comments by midday Friday, far more than the video of his speech about China.

Face-masking: In an email to constituents, 2nd District Congressman Markwayne Mullin criticized face mask mandates and urged constituents to show a little courage in dealing with COVID-19. "Where does it stop?" he wrote. "Our constitutional rights and freedoms don't disappear because we are afraid of the unknown. The fears COVID-19 has created cannot compromise the basic fundamentals of our country. Wearing a face mask should be a personal choice, not a government mandate. ... It's not the government's place to mandate what we have to do to be able to leave our homes or tell us that we can't go to a place of worship to pray during a national crisis." Dots and dashes: Inhofe said he favors smaller, more numerous U.S. military installations in Europe. ... Mullin hawked "Protect Our Police," a political action committee that says it supports "pro-police" candidates and is touted by Fox News.

... Kevin Kincheloe, an aide to U.S. Sen. James Lankford and before that to the late Tom Coburn, has moved to Anheuser-Busch as a lobbyist. ... Lucas and 5th District Congresswoman Kendra Horn were the only members of Oklahoma's House delegation to vote to remove sculptures related to the Confederacy from the U.S. Capitol. First District Congressman Kevin Hern and 4th District Congressman Tom Cole voted against the measure, while 2nd District Congressman Markwayne Mullin did not vote. Featured video Be the first to know Get local news delivered to your inbox! Sign up! * I understand and agree that registration on or use of this site constitutes agreement to its user agreement and privacy policy.