



LAW ENFORCEMENT DRONE ASSOCIATION

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Subject: AUVSI President's Op-Ed Article in Drone Life on February 24, 2025

After reading the opinion [article](#)¹ written by AUVSI President Michael Robbins, I was extremely disheartened at the tone, presentation of "facts" and overt gaslighting regarding legislation related to the use of drones from China. The Law Enforcement Drone Association (LEDA) remains platform agnostic, and we urge AUVSI, which stands for the Association of Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International (note what the "I" stands for) to take the same agnostic position. Our stance has always been to let our member agencies and pilots decide what platform works best for them and their communities at large. We make this stand and statement to drive market competition, innovation and the end user's ability to make an informed decision about drone platforms based upon capability, price and mission. We put America first by allowing our first responders to use whatever platform they deem has the best technology is to preserve life and its quality for their communities.

I'm just angry now. We have read and heard numerous times Mr. Robbins' assertion that AUVSI doesn't support an outright ban of drones manufactured in China, but they continually send representatives to testify in support of both state and federal bills with a "sunset period", where after a certain number of years, users are no longer allowed to use the Chinese drones they already have in their possession. To what does that equate? A ban. I have watched, with my own eyes, AUVSI representatives testify in support of banning Chinese drones for public safety agencies in various states.

In his second sentence, Mr. Robbins states, "With the likely restriction of drones and certain critical components originating from the People's Republic of China (PRC), the time for decisive action is now." The irony here is that he is insinuating that random legislators just so happen to be close to banning these drones and we need to be ready. The reality here is that his organization has been at the forefront of the attempts to get them banned and he's coming in here like the "beacon of readiness and light" saying that we need to prepare for this. I don't think he, or legislators, truly understand that when these bans happen, public safety drone programs will be shut down. They will not be able to operate. They will not have drones to fly to help save lives and mitigate risk to agencies and the public at large. There will not be readily available, capable non-banned drones that can replace, as most of these bills are "rip and replace" with no funding attached. They are unfunded mandates and because of them, people may lose their lives. Elderly citizens and young children may not be found when they wander off into cold weather and freeze to death. This happens almost once a week in cities across the nation. They are found by drones and cared for by emergency responders once located.

Tactical teams won't be able to use inexpensive and capable interior drones used to visually clear structures of armed/barricaded suspects. Instead, agencies will have to blindly send in human tactical operators and put them in the line of fire or attack. Tactical teams used to send in human operators, and while effective still, we have lost tactical operators to ambush once inside of

structures when drones were not employed. LAPD Officer Randy Simmons was shot and killed during a tactical [incident](#)² while making entry into a home in Los Angeles shortly before I joined the department. If only we had capable drones back in 2007-2008 to do that job, maybe we could have avoided that tragedy. We do have this tech now and strongly encourage its use daily.

Agencies have been deploying interior drones effectively now for under \$2,000, instead of domestic versions at between \$15-25,000 per aircraft. If my math is correct, that is 7-10X the cost of how agencies are currently operating effectively. AUVSI wants to rip that away and make agencies pay 7-10X the money to buy one drone. Where is the logic?

In Mr. Robbins' third sentence, he states without any evidence, "The security vulnerabilities associated with PRC drones are well-documented within the national security community, and the threat they pose to U.S. interests cannot be overstated." Then he goes on to state that it's all classified and such. Another attempt to gaslight when multiple independent studies, including by the Department of the Interior, have been conducted of specific Chinese aircraft and shown that data is not pushed back to China. This is akin to saying, "These things are bad, I can't tell you why, but we should ban them." No. We don't believe you. We welcome the stated clause in Section 1709 of [NDAA of 2024](#)³ mandating a study of DJI and Autel drones for data security. If, in fact, the drones are literally sending data back against the will of the pilot, then that should be known about and addressed. Everything up to now is speculation and a "possibility" or a "potential threat". What we do know now is that agencies across the globe are using these drones to save lives. Full stop.

Over 1,000 lives have been saved using drones according to a [Drone Rescue Map](#)⁴. Now this map states it doesn't account for which type of drone was used, but considering that Chinese drones account for about 80% of the public safety market, I imagine they add up to about 80% or more of the lives saved. Is AUVSI really pushing to take away these life saving platforms away from programs in the US? Is the pursuit of regulatory capture worth American lives?

Mr. Robbins states that US drone manufacturers "now match or surpass" their Chinese competitors. LEDA desires this to be true. Believe me. We strongly desire for there to be solid US made drones to compete in the market. But I challenge Mr. Robbins to demonstrate one apples-to-apples comparison of an American drone to its Chinese counterpart and show me where our American drones meet or exceed the capabilities of Chinese drones. Don't show me specs. Show me real world capability and performance. Even the Chinese drone manufacturers list specs that aren't really attainable like flight times and such. But in my 10 years of operating drones in the public safety sector and literally seeing them side-by-side, I have yet to see an American drone outperform a Chinese one. And until that day comes, banning the perfectly capable drones our teams across the country have is not only reckless, it's negligent.

Also, current programs have a grab bag of different types of drones for different uses. If these types of bills pass, agencies would be forced to give up sometimes up to 10 drones for the price of one non-banned replacement. This creates a devastating effect on operability for the program. Instead of having 10 drones like they used to, they would instead only have one. This is not sustainable. The reason they might need so many of them is that in the event they fly one into a house on a tactical mission and it goes down for some reason, they have back up drones to send in immediately to take over. What Mr. Robbins is pushing through his lobbying efforts would mean tactical teams only get ONE shot to get it right, or they have to send team members into harm's way.



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Search and Rescue teams use these drones to fly in precarious weather and topographical conditions. If forced away from them, they would be forced to use drones that can't fly far enough without losing connectivity. Believe me. I have seen it with my own eyes. Allied manufactured drones lose connection and either fly away or return home sometimes only a few hundred feet away. This would cost lives.

US manufacturers are not at a point where they can produce drones at the level they're seeking to demand with their lobbying efforts. So banning them, even if in three years, only creates a void in the industry where teams can't get their hands on drones in a timely manner and would not be able to deploy them by the time their current ones are banned. And beyond public safety, who then produces any consumer drones for our commercial uses like film, television, insurance adjustors, real estate agents, sporting events, agriculture, construction, drone service providers and the list goes on. No American manufacturer or allied nation's company produces drones for this sector. Entire sections of industry would be scuttled. It will be a lot of years before we have a company rise up and be able to produce at scale the demand created by these regulations. When asked by podcast hosts Greg Reverdiau and Haye Kesteloo on the [PiXL Podcast](#)⁵ about timeline for being able to produce at scale to meet the demand set by an outright ban, BRINC CEO Blake Resnik stated, "If budget is truly not a constraint, and that's a big 'if', but if it was truly not a constraint, I think something like 3 years is possible."

LEDA has over 3200 members across the globe and grows every day. I can say, with certainty, that almost every one of our members is angered by the legislation happening in their states and our country borne from greed and in an attempt to limit their ability to save lives. LEDA exists to set a standard of excellence for the training and use of drones in the public safety sector. Excellence is not telling our members that they should settle for anything but the best in technology and tactics. Let's make America the best, instead of setting us back 5 years and expecting us to preserve the same quality of life using technology. Let agencies choose the tech that best suits their needs and the needs and budgets of the communities they serve. Encourage and incentivize US innovation, don't penalize communities and put lives at risk. That is all.

Sincerely,

Jon Beal
President and Chief Executive Officer
Law Enforcement Drone Association
A 501C(3) Non-Profit Organization

Citations/Sources:

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