



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Bill sanctioning Chinese officials for selecting next Dalai Lama introduced in Senate and House

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A bill that will upgrade US support for Tibet and penalize Chinese officials for interfering in Tibetan religious practices to appoint the next Dalai Lama has now been introduced in both chambers of Congress.

The bipartisan Tibetan Policy and Support Act was introduced in the Senate today, Sept. 24, 2019 by Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) and co-sponsors Sens. Ben Cardin (D-Md.), Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and Ed Markey (D-Mass.). The bill was also introduced in the House of Representatives on Sept. 13 by Rep. James McGovern (D-Mass.). McGovern and Rubio are chair and co-chair of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China.

The new legislation includes a number of provisions to help the people of Tibet, who have lived under a brutal Chinese occupation for the past 60 years since the current Dalai Lama, now 84, was forced into exile.

Among other efforts, the legislation will:

- Make it official US policy that “decisions regarding the identification and installation of Tibetan Buddhist religious leaders, including a future 15th Dalai Lama, are exclusively spiritual matters that should be made by the appropriate religious authorities within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition and in the context of the will of religious practitioners and the instructions of the [current] 14th Dalai Lama.”

The Chinese government has claimed that it has the authority to select the Dalai Lama’s reincarnation. But this bill imposes sanctions on Chinese officials who attempt to identify or install a future Dalai Lama, including potentially having their assets frozen and their entry to the US denied. The State Department will be also required to work at the international level with like-minded countries on this issue.

- Not permit China to open a new consulate in the US until a US consulate is allowed in Lhasa, Tibet’s historic capital. The bill also says all Tibetan areas under Chinese control should be overseen by one US consular district, rather than by the several districts that now oversee them.
- Update the Tibetan Policy Act, landmark legislation from 2002 that made support for Tibet part of US law.

- Mandate that the State Department work with US businesses and individuals operating in Tibet to ensure their work takes into account the human rights of the Tibetan people.
- Require the secretary of state to pursue a regional framework on water security in recognition of Tibet's role as a source of water for more than 1 billion people. The secretary will also have to engage the Chinese government and NGOs to encourage the involvement of Tibetan nomads and other Tibetans in grassland management policies to protect Tibet's fragile environment.
- Praise the Dalai Lama for leading the democratization of the Tibetan system of government in exile and acknowledge that the Central Tibetan Administration, based in Dharamsala, India, reflects and represents the aspirations of the Tibetan people worldwide.
- Authorize ongoing US appropriations that support humanitarian projects for Tibetans in Tibet and in exile.

The Tibetan Policy and Support Act builds on the success of the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, which was signed into law last year and requires the State Department to deny entry to the US for the Chinese officials responsible for keeping American diplomats, journalists and ordinary citizens out of Tibet.

The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) endorses the Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2019 introduced both in the House and in the Senate.

Following its introduction in the House, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry said on Sept. 19 that the bill is "a gross interference in China's internal affairs. It sends out a gravely wrong signal to separatist forces for 'Tibet independence.'"

The bill, however, mandates that the special coordinator for Tibetan issues "promote substantive dialogue without preconditions between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Dalai Lama or his representatives or Central Tibetan Administration representatives leading to a negotiated agreement on Tibet."

The Tibetan Policy and Support Act is cosponsored in the House by Reps. Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio), Tom Malinowski (D-NJ), Ben McAdams (D-Utah), Mark Meadows (R-NC), Brad Sherman (D-Calif.), Chris Smith (R-NJ) and Thomas Suozzi (D-NY).

Quotes

Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), who introduced the bill in the Senate:

"This much-needed bill updates U.S. policy toward Tibet amid new challenges posed by the Chinese Communist Party against Tibetans. We must continue to shine a bright light on the Chinese government's repression of the Tibetan people and explore new tools to protect their religion, language, and culture, both inside and outside China."

Rep. James McGovern (D-Mass.), who introduced the bill in the House:

"I am proud to support this new legislation to strengthen U.S. support for the Tibetan people in their struggle for human rights, religious freedom and genuine autonomy. Chinese officials should be aware that efforts to interfere in the Tibetan Buddhist practice of recognizing and choosing its religious leaders, including a possible 15th Dalai Lama, will be strongly opposed by the U.S. and subject to targeted sanctions including those in the Global Magnitsky Act."

Matteo Mecacci, president of the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT):

“For decades, the US has supported the Dalai Lama’s efforts to protect human rights and democratic freedoms for the people of Tibet, and with this new bill, Congress is saying to Beijing that it will continue to stand up for Tibetans once His Holiness eventually passes away. Not only does the Tibetan Policy and Support Act recognize that the Dalai Lama’s succession is a matter of universal religious freedom, it also establishes that Tibet is an important part of America’s national interests in the region. ICT would like to thank Rep. Jim McGovern, Sen. Marco Rubio and every cosponsor of this legislation. Now we call on ICT members, as well as all Tibet supporters and Tibetan Americans around the country, to ask their senators and representatives to sign onto this bill and pass it into law as soon as possible.”