



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Bill sanctioning Chinese officials, supporting Tibetans' rights, advances in House

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A House committee today advanced legislation that will upgrade US support for Tibet and defend Tibetans' religious freedom by sanctioning Chinese officials who attempt to appoint the next Dalai Lama.

The legislation, the Tibetan Policy and Support Act (TPSA), was unanimously approved by the House Foreign Affairs Committee today, Dec. 18, 2019, at a markup hearing on Capitol Hill.

The next step will be for the full House to vote on the bipartisan bill, which was introduced this fall by Rep. James McGovern (D-Mass.). A similar bill has been introduced in the Senate by Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.).

Today's vote marked a major step forward for the legislation, which will provide vital support to the people of Tibet—a historically independent country that China has brutally occupied for the past 60 years—and help combat Beijing's long-term goal of installing a pro-Chinese puppet as the future Dalai Lama against the wishes of the Tibetan Buddhist community.

Bill provisions

The TPSA will:

- Make it official US policy that the selection of Tibetan Buddhist leaders, including a future Dalai Lama, should follow the desires of the religion's practitioners and the instructions of the current Dalai Lama, free from government interference.
- Sanction Chinese officials who attempt to appoint their own Dalai Lama in the future. These sanctions could include having their assets frozen and entry to the US denied. The State Department will also have to work at the international level to build support for Tibetan Buddhists' freedom to choose their own leaders without government interference.
- Forbid China from opening a new consulate in the US until a US consulate is allowed in Lhasa, Tibet's capital.
- Update the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002, landmark legislation that made support for Tibet part of US law.
- Address water security and other environmental issues in Tibet as matters of geopolitical importance.
- Formalize funding for humanitarian projects for Tibetans living in Tibet and in exile until at least 2025

- Commend the Dalai Lama and Tibetans in exile for adopting a democratic system of government.

Quotes from lawmakers and ICT

During today's markup, committee members spoke up in a bipartisan fashion to express their support for the TPSA and the Tibetan people.

Committee Chairman Eliot Engel (D-NY) said: "It is an unthinkable violation of the basic principles of religious freedom that the Chinese government will choose the religious leaders of the Tibetan people rather than allowing the Tibetan people to make this decision through their ancient and sacred tradition. With this bill, we send a clear message: if Chinese officials infringe on the religious freedom of the Tibetan people, we will hold them accountable. I am proud to support this measure and hope that all members will do the same."

Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ) said: "In the 17 years since the original Tibetan Policy Act of 2002, the human rights situation in Tibet has sadly and tragically worsened. The Chinese government has refused to enter into a dialogue with Tibetan leaders, and Chinese officials have threatened to select future Tibetan Buddhist leaders, including the successor to the fourteenth Dalai Lama, in clear violation of their international religious freedom obligations and the traditional practices of the Tibetan Buddhist faith community. Furthermore, the policies of the Chinese government have severely degraded Tibetan religion and culture, language, livelihood and the natural environment.

"This bill along with the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, which the Congress passed in 2016 [it was passed in 2017], sends the right message to Beijing: the fate of Tibet, its people, resources, and religion are a strategic interest to the United States. Above all, they are entitled to freedom and they are entitled to democracy."

Rep. Steve Chabot (R-OH) said: "I'd like to voice my support for H.R. 4331, the Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2019. I want to thank Mr. McGovern and Mr. Smith for their work on this important legislation, which defends the religious freedom of Tibetan Buddhists by affirming the religious nature of the Dalai Lama's succession. The Chinese communist party is unwilling to recognize any authority beyond its own power, human or divine. We cannot live in a world where government, not people's consciences, determines how religion is to be practiced. With that I would urge my colleagues to support this bill."

Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA) said, "I'm proud to be a cosponsor of H.R. 4331, the Tibetan Policy and Support Act. In response to Chinese official threats to select future Tibetan Buddhist leaders, this bill establishes as US policy that the succession or reincarnation of Tibetan Buddhist leaders, including the future 15th Dalai Lama, is an exclusively religious matter to be decided solely by the Tibetan Buddhist community, and not by the Chinese government.

"I think that's a very assertive statement by this Committee and by this Congress, and is a strong symbol of support for the Tibetan people, and I hope a source of warning to the Chinese government not to interfere in such an important process. I believe that reinforcing and supporting the goals and aspirations of an entire ethnic population, the Tibetan people, is a very important value to this Committee and ultimately the Congress, to support and reassert. I think the authors for bringing this bill before us."

Commenting after the approval of the legislation, Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA), Co-Chairman of the Congressional Executive Commission on China, and Chairman of the Rules Committee said "I am proud that today the House Foreign Affairs Committee has passed 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 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."

International Campaign for Tibet President Matteo Mecacci said: "For decades, the Chinese Communists' long-term plan has been to destroy Tibetan national identity and culture and then replace it with government-controlled institutions in all sectors of society. The 14th Dalai Lama has effectively thwarted these efforts, both by making Tibetan Buddhism and culture increasingly popular all over the world, and by continuing to enjoy the reverence and respect of the people inside Tibet, despite China's attempts to tarnish his image."

Mecacci added: "By interfering in the selection of the next Dalai Lama, Beijing believes it will be able to control Tibetan Buddhism and use it to increase its influence and soft power around the globe. By advancing the Tibetan Policy and Support Act today, the US Congress has not only reaffirmed its programmatic and political support for Tibet with important new provisions, but has also warned Beijing that the undermining of religious freedom, and the institution of the Dalai Lama, won't be accepted by the free world in silence, and that those responsible will be sanctioned."