



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Tibet “slow-moving genocide we must stop,” Rep. Levin says

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Rep. Andy Levin has visited Tibet, interviewed the Dalai Lama and fallen in love with Tibetan civilization, and he believes we must take action to prevent China from destroying it.

“It’s like a slow extinction of a whole culture through infiltration, through surveillance, through starving it out of existence,” the Michigan Democrat said at an International Campaign for Tibet event online last week. “We simply cannot let that happen.”

Levin spoke as the featured guest on the latest episode of ICT’s Tibet Talks, a series of live conversations about Tibet with inspiring thinkers, leaders, activists and artists.

The first-term congressman joined Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass.; Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback; and former Republican Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida as major US political leaders to appear on the show.

Unique connection

Although every guest on Tibet Talks feels a special affinity for Tibet, Levin’s personal connection to the Himalayan country—which China annexed more than 60 years ago—is unique.

As a religion major in college, Levin says he felt drawn to Tibetan Buddhism. During graduate school, he studied at the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, India.

In the summer of 1989, Levin decided he would try to enter Tibet, which the Chinese government routinely denies foreigners the right to visit.

“I got so far as Chengdu,” a city that serves as a major gateway to Tibet, “when the Tiananmen Massacre happened,” Levin said.

Unable to get access to the Tibet Autonomous Region, an administrative area of China that spans about half of Tibet, Levin instead traveled north to Tibetan regions included in China’s Sichuan and Gansu provinces.

When he returned to the United States, he managed to secure an interview with the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan leader whom the Chinese government forced into exile in 1959.

“I got to spend an hour with him, interviewing him,” Levin said. “Then, I don’t know, weeks later, he was named the Nobel Peace Laureate.”

Support for Tibet in Congress

Thirty years later, Levin recounted that story during ICT's 30th anniversary celebration of the Dalai Lama's Nobel Peace Prize.

He also delighted the crowd at ICT's office in Washington, DC by saying a few phrases in Tibetan.

Levin's experiences with Tibet came full circle in another way this year when the Chinese government closed the US consulate in Chengdu.

Noting that the consulate "was a critical vantage point for monitoring human rights in Tibet," Levin led a bipartisan group of 110 Congress members in sending a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo requesting a strategy for continued reporting on human rights in Tibet and Xinjiang.

"That's a big step the [Trump] administration can take and take quickly," Levin said. "Another big thing that the administration should do is appoint and make sure the Senate confirms a special coordinator for Tibetan issues, as required by the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002."

Updating US policy on Tibet

Levin acknowledged the nearly two decades that have passed since the Tibetan Policy Act became law.

Earlier this year, he and his colleagues in the House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved the Tibetan Policy and Support Act, a new bill that will dramatically upgrade the earlier legislation.

The TPSA will deepen US political and humanitarian support for the Tibetan people. It will also sanction any Chinese officials who try to name their own Dalai Lama in the future, as the Chinese government has long said it will do.

The bill is now awaiting passage by the Senate.

"I think the reason it's so important for the Senate to act is not really so much about one provision," Levin said. "It's to show really all of our allies and of course the Chinese that we are going to continue to beat this drum, and we're not going to go away, and we're going to insist on the rights of the Tibetan people."

ICT President Matteo Mecacci will testify about the TPSA and other Tibet-related efforts at a hearing of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China this Wednesday, Sept. 30.

Future support

Saying Tibet "really stands out as a kind of slow-moving genocide that we must stop," Levin said he is already looking at ways to advance the Tibetan cause in the next Congress that takes office in 2021.

He said it's vital that US support for Tibetans remains bipartisan.

Before his Tibet Talk last week, the previous speaker in the series was Ros-Lehtinen, the former Republican congresswoman who retired in 2019 after fiercely advocating for Tibetans throughout her 30 years on Capitol Hill.

Levin took office just as Ros-Lehtinen retired, helping to show the continuous, bipartisan nature of American support for the Tibetan cause.

Talk to Congress

Both Levin's and Ros-Lehtinen's talks were part of ICT's Tibet 2020 campaign, which aims to tell the candidates for office why Tibet matters this election year.

The campaign asks ICT members and other supporters of Tibet to contact the Democratic and Republican parties to urge them to include Tibet in their agendas.

"People may get cynical about being in touch with your member of Congress," Levin said. "Don't. It matters how many phone calls, emails, letters we receive. The volume, but also when people put a personal touch on it. It matters hugely. And our offices track all of that, every one of us.

"And so, it really is important for people to make their voices heard."



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