



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Investigation sought after ICT chairman's testimony on Chinese censorship

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Following a hearing where International Campaign for Tibet Chairman Richard Gere testified about Chinese censorship hurting US interests—particularly when it comes to Tibet—senators have asked the US International Trade Commission to investigate.

Outgoing Senate Finance Committee Chair Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, wrote to the commission on Monday to request an up to 18-month inquiry into how foreign government censorship can act as a barrier to US exports.

Grassley's letter asks the commission to investigate and describe foreign censorship practices that impede trade and to provide as many examples as possible.

It also requests an estimate of the economic costs of foreign censorship on different US business sectors and an examination of self-censorship by American companies.

Grassley sent the letter at the request of Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, who chairs the Subcommittee on International Trade, Customs, and Global Competitiveness and led a hearing last year on “Censorship as a Non-Tariff Barrier to Trade.”

Lack of access

The hearing on June 30, 2020 focused on how foreign censorship, particularly from China, hurts US trade.

“For centuries, countries blocked trade through physically restricting access to their ports,” Cornyn said at the time. “Today, the same happens with firewalls, filters and outright restrictions to access.”

Throughout the hearing, Gere, actor, activist and philanthropist, emphasized that China's censorship complements its refusal to give American journalists, businesses and ordinary citizens the same level of access to China that their Chinese counterparts have to the United States.

China's failure to reciprocate is even more acute in Tibet, a historically independent country that China annexed more than 60 years ago and continues to rule with an iron fist.

“The Chinese government highly restricts access to Tibet for Americans,” Gere said, “including journalists and politicians, like no other areas of China, while Chinese citizens face no such limitations when they visit the US.”

US legislation

Gere praised Congress for passing the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act in late 2018. As part of the legislation, the State Department announced last summer that it had banned the Chinese officials responsible for keeping Americans out of Tibet from entering the United States.

This marked the first time the US government denied entry to Chinese officials over their actions in Tibet.

During his testimony, Gere also asked the senators to cosponsor the bipartisan Tibetan Policy and Support Act and to raise it with Senate leadership for swift passage.

Congress eventually passed the TPSA on Dec. 21, 2020 and it became law on Dec.27. The new law will dramatically upgrade US support for Tibetans, including by sanctioning Chinese officials if they try to interfere in the succession of the Dalai Lama and by forbidding China from opening a new consulate in the United States until it allows a US consulate in Lhasa, Tibet's capital.

Trade investigation

During the hearing, Gere also spoke about China's influence in Hollywood, where he has been a major star for more than 40 years.

“While I can't say that my speaking out for human rights in China has directly affected my career, I'm probably an unusual case ...” he said. “There's no doubt that the combination of Chinese censorship, coupled with American film studios' desire to access China's market, can lead to self-censorship and to avoiding social issues that great American films once addressed.”

Self-censorship is one of the issues that the investigation from the US International Trade Commission would address.

The investigation could help lead to human rights playing a bigger role in trade policies and would add to the momentum in US support for Tibet.



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