



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Tibetan Americans, Congressional leaders celebrate new Tibet law

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Tibetan Americans joined with leaders from Congress today to celebrate a new law that has dramatically upgraded US support for the people of Tibet.

The virtual celebration of the Tibetan Policy and Support Act aired this morning, Feb. 16, 2021, on TibetTV.

The event, which the Regional Tibetan Association of Massachusetts, Amherst organized, featured songs and prayers, appearances by Tibetan association leaders, and remarks by members of Congress and their staff, including Rep. James McGovern, D-Mass.

“In the last couple years, we have passed more legislation on human rights in China and on issues related to Tibet than at any other time in Congress,” McGovern told the Tibetan Americans and Tibet supporters who participated in the gathering. “And that is again because of the advocacy. Don’t ever, ever think that your voices don’t matter.”

Tibetan Policy and Support Act

One piece of legislation McGovern was alluding to is the Tibetan Policy and Support Act, which passed Congress on Dec. 21, 2020 and became law a few days later.

McGovern and Rep. Chris Smith, D-NJ, introduced the TPSA in the House of Representatives in late 2019, while Sens. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., and Ben Cardin, D-Md., introduced it in the Senate.

The bipartisan bill provided a much-needed update to the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002.

Among other things, the TPSA confronts the Chinese government—which has brutally occupied Tibet for more than 60 years—over its plan to appoint its own Dalai Lama once the 85-year-old Tibetan spiritual leader eventually passes away.

The TPSA makes it official US policy that only the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Buddhist community can decide on his succession. If any Chinese officials try to interfere in that process, they will face US sanctions under the legislation.

“The Chinese Communist Party would very much like to see the demise of His Holiness’ [the Dalai Lama’s] legacy,” Ngodup Tsering, the Dalai Lama’s representative to North America, said during the TPSA celebration. “But Congress sent a resounding message that they will not remain idle in the face of historic injustice.”

New era

The TPSA also:

- Strengthens efforts to restart negotiations between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama’s representatives after more than a decade
- Addresses water security and climate change in Tibet, which is warming nearly three times faster than the global average and provides water to more than 1 billion people in Asia
- Forbids China from opening a new consulate in the US until it allows a US consulate in Lhasa, Tibet’s capital
- Formalizes funding for humanitarian projects for Tibetans inside Tibet and in exile until at least 2025

Throughout today’s celebration, several speakers said the TPSA marks a new era in the history of the Tibetan struggle.

Reaction in Tibet, China

Lobsang Sangay, president of the Central Tibetan Administration—which provides democratic representation for Tibetans in exile—said the TPSA met with overwhelming positivity inside Tibet, which the Chinese government largely keeps closed off to the outside world.

“Inside Tibet, they were celebrating it,” Sangay said. “In monasteries, they were praying, they were burning incense to appreciate the US government for what you have done.”

He added that even “in the dark cells of prisons” in Tibet, “they are very, very appreciative for passing this bill.”

The Chinese government, on the other hand, reacted to the TPSA by sending its military into the streets of Tibet’s capital, flying helicopters over the historic Potala Palace and conducting an anti-riot drill out of fear of an uprising against Chinese rule, Sangay said.

“So that means you have sent the right message to Beijing,” he said, “that the US government and the people are with Tibet and the Tibetan people for a long time to come.

“You have sent a powerful message, the right message, a message with justice.”

Looking to the future

The TPSA is just the latest action the US government has taken in recent years to help the people of Tibet.

In 2018, Congress passed the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, which takes aim at China’s unfair policy of keeping American journalists, diplomats and ordinary citizens out of Tibet, even though Chinese citizens are largely free to travel anywhere they want in the United States.

Despite this momentum, the participants in today’s celebration said more needs to happen to address China’s repression inside Tibet.

“This bill wasn’t a one off,” Bethany Poulos, policy analyst in Rubio’s office, said. “We’re going to continue to work on this issue. It’s going to be a priority in Congress.”

Poulos added that there will be efforts to ensure the Biden administration fully implements the TPSA.

Expressing gratitude

McGovern—whom several participants in the event said will go down in Tibetan history for his many years of leadership on the Tibetan issue—said he expects the administration to appoint a new high-ranking special coordinator for Tibetan issues in the State Department soon.

McGovern added that he hopes the Dalai Lama will be able to travel back to the US to meet with President Biden and Vice President Harris. The Dalai Lama previously met with Presidents George H. W. Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama.

Toward the end of today's event, Bhuchung Tsering, the interim president of the International Campaign for Tibet, thanked McGovern, Rubio and their colleagues "for giving hope to the Tibetan people."

"Thank you for supporting the vision of His Holiness the Dalai Lama," Tsering said, "and thank you for heeding the call of the Tibetan American community."

"Congress has done its part in passing the legislation. We now look forward to working with Congressman McGovern, Senator Rubio and their colleagues in the Congress to see that the Biden Administration fully implements the TPSA and RATA," Tsering added.

After that, Tsering Dhundup, president of the Regional Tibetan Association of Massachusetts, Amherst, symbolically presented citations to McGovern and Rubio on behalf of all Tibetan associations in North America.



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