



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Tibet Lobby Day returns in person, promotes Resolve Tibet Act

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Tibet supporters met with members of Congress and Congressional staff last week at the first in-person Tibet Lobby Day in years, building crucial support for a new Tibet bill and sharpening Tibetan Americans' advocacy skills.

Tibet Lobby Day 2022 brought over 100 Tibetan Americans and Tibet supporters to Washington, DC on Sept. 22-23 for more than 80 meetings with Congressional offices.

This year's participants—who included Thondup Tsering of Amherst, Massachusetts, who is a member of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile—came from California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin and Washington, DC.

Traveling all over Capitol Hill and opening up about how China's illegal occupation of Tibet has harmed them and their families, the Lobby Day participants made one main request of their members of Congress: Support the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act, a bipartisan bill introduced in July by Reps. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., and Michael McCaul, R-Texas.

Known as the Resolve Tibet Act, the bill will push the Chinese government to resume negotiations on Tibet's future with the Dalai Lama's envoys for the first time since 2010. The legislation will also support the Tibetan people's right to self-determination.

“Several Congressional offices we met were excited about the bill. We look forward to more members of Congress cosponsoring the legislation as a result of the Tibet Lobby Day participants,” said Franz Matzner, government relations director of the International Campaign for Tibet, which organized the Lobby Day alongside other groups including Students for a Free Tibet and Tibetan associations around the country.

Matzner added, “It also was thrilling to witness so many Tibetan Americans, especially young people, speak up about their personal experiences and call on their elected leaders to take action. The Chinese government has hidden a great deal of its oppression in Tibet from the outside world, so we at ICT are committed to empowering Tibetan Americans to raise their voices and shine the light of truth on Tibet.

“That's exactly what this Tibet Lobby Day helped do.”

Lobbying on Capitol Hill

This year marked the first time Tibet Lobby Day—an annual event since 2009—took place in person since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

The return of face-to-face lobbying allowed Tibetan Americans and Tibet supporters from around the United States to meet with their legislators on Capitol Hill.

One of the highlights of the event was the meeting with Sen. Patrick Leahy, the retiring Vermont Democrat, who took time out of his busy final months on the Hill to greet Sonam Lhakhang, President of the Tibetan Association of Vermont, Namgyal Choedup, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration to North America, Tencho Gyatso, ICT's Interim Vice President, and others.

The meeting turned emotional as Leahy, the longest-serving member of the Senate, spoke movingly and tearfully about his and his wife's many years of friendship with the Dalai Lama.

Leahy showed the lobbyists a photo he took in the 1980s of a man in Tibet hugging his baby son while holding a picture of the Dalai Lama. Although Chinese police arrest Tibetans for owning photos of the Buddhist leader, the man wanted Leahy to photograph him with it.

To thank Leahy for his incredible support of Tibet, Representative Choedup presented him with a "thangka" (a Tibetan traditional painting) and a "khata" (a Tibetan greeting scarf).

Celebrating 20 years of US Tibet policy

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., another longtime presence in the Senate, also met with constituents from her home state during Tibet Lobby Day.

In addition, Feinstein provided a video message for Lobby Day about the 20th anniversary of the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002, a law she introduced alongside Sen. Craig Thomas, R-Wyo., Rep. Tom Lantos, D-Calif., and Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Ill. Feinstein is the only member of that quartet who is still in Congress.

Feinstein's video played during the reception for Tibet Lobby Day at ICT's office on the evening of Sept. 22. At the reception, Choedup addressed the participants and gave a brief overview of the Central Tibetan Administration's approach to the United States.

The reception also featured a five-and-a-half-minute video on the TPA's 20th anniversary, showing how the bill codified support for Tibet in US law for the first time and set the stage for two decades of American political and programmatic initiatives on Tibet.

The next step, ICT leaders said, is to pass the Resolve Tibet Act, which can carry Tibet policy forward to a long-awaited peaceful resolution of China's occupation of Tibet.

But Lobby Day, they added, is not all serious.

"It's a lot of fun," Gyatso, ICT's Interim Vice President, said. "We have people who got married after coming here," she added to laughter before inviting the participants to a dinner featuring authentic Tibetan cuisine.

Lhakhang, the Tibetan Association of Vermont President, said he was asked by the community members to participate in this year's Tibet Lobby Day so that he can offer their gratitude to retiring Senator Leahy and also to urge their members of congress to support the Resolve Tibet Act.

"It was a successful event," he said.



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