



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Congressional and Tibetan leaders celebrate Dalai Lama Gold Medal anniversary

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Nancy Pelosi walked to the podium.

“With absolutely no authority to call you to attention ...” the Speaker Emerita of the US House said with a smile. “[I’m] eager to tell you so many things.”

As Pelosi spoke, behind her stood a photo taken 16 years ago that day: the Dalai Lama receiving the US Congressional Gold Medal from Pelosi, then-President George W. Bush and other US leaders on Oct. 17, 2007.

To mark the anniversary of that historic moment, Pelosi and other current and former members of Congress joined the Tibetan Sikyong (President) Penpa Tsering, chairman of the International Campaign for Tibet Richard Gere and more for a celebration on Capitol Hill, just a short walk from where the Tibetan leader received the gold medal in the Capitol Rotunda 16 years earlier.

The event, organized by the Office of Tibet, the Capital Area Tibetan Association and ICT, was attended by members of Congress, Congressional staffers, administration officials, members of the NGO community, and friends and supporters of Tibet.

It became an opportunity for new and old friends to express their continued dedication to resolve the Tibet-China conflict—and to swap stories about the Dalai Lama.

“Aren’t we all blessed to have been exposed to his greatness and his goodness?” Pelosi asked the crowd. “His Holiness, such a blessing.”

[See photos of the event!](#)

Dalai Lama’s Congressional Gold Medal

The Congressional Gold Medal is the US’ highest civilian award. It was presented to the Dalai Lama through the [bipartisan Fourteenth Dalai Lama Congressional Gold Medal Act](#).

“I want to thank all the members who have sponsored this bill way back,” said Penpa, the sikyong (president) elected by Tibetans in exile. “You know how much it means to the Tibetan people.”

One of the original sponsors of the bill, former Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, attended the anniversary celebration. The other main sponsors, Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Craig Thomas and Rep. Tom Lantos, have all passed away.

Despite the 16 years since the gold medal ceremony, the event showed the Dalai Lama and Tibet still have many devoted supporters at the Capitol on both sides of the aisle.

“Everyone talks about how divided Congress is these days, and there’s some division,” said Rep. Chris Smith, R-NJ. “But the issue of caring for the Dalai Lama, respecting the tremendous work that he has done and continues to do, cuts across all those political divides.”

Rep. Jan Schakowsky shared a personal story of His Holiness’ impact on her family. The Democrat from Illinois mentioned that after her son-in-law died, the Dalai Lama wrote a note of comfort for his mother, who was a Buddhist.

“Just an everyday woman who had lost her son was given such a gift from the Dalai Lama,” Schakowsky recounted. “But that’s the kind of person he was. In addition to the great leader and the great inspirer and the great man of peace, he took a moment for a woman.”

Support for Tibet

The event also highlighted the need to continue supporting Tibet until the Tibet-China conflict is resolved.

Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn., whose district includes many Tibetan Americans, said, “We cannot be passive about what is going on in Tibet.” McCollum added: “To the Tibetan community who are here today, thank you for including us, thank you for letting us be part of your story, and thank you for sharing the Dalai Lama with the world.”

Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., quoted [President Bush’s speech at the Gold Medal ceremony](#) in 2007. “As we celebrate this really historic anniversary,” McGovern said, “my hope is that one day the Chinese authorities will realize that President Bush was right all along—and I very rarely say that. The Dalai Lama is a ‘man of peace and reconciliation.’ They have an opportunity to engage now, and I hope that they take it soon.”

McGovern is one of the main sponsors of the [bipartisan Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act](#), a bill that will pressure China to get back to the negotiating table with the Dalai Lama’s envoys to reach an agreement that will peacefully resolve China’s decades-long, brutal occupation of Tibet.

Legislation like the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama Congressional Gold Medal Act help keep the Tibet movement going strong, Tibetan leaders said at the event.

“Whenever world leaders, governments, parliamentarians, express solidarity with the Dalai Lama and with the Tibetan people, that message is received by millions of Tibetans living under harsh Chinese occupation,” said ICT President Tencho Gyatso.

“Even after 64 years of Chinese suppression, the indomitable spirit of the Tibetans inside Tibet sustains us in exile,” added Penpa, who met with several members of Congress, State Department officials and other stakeholders during his trip to Washington. “It’s because of their spirit that we keep running for them, working for them.”

Honor for Americans

Congress awarding the Dalai Lama had brought the usual protests from China, which [controls Tibet under a harsh occupation](#) and has forced His Holiness to live in exile from his native Tibet since 1959.

Despite the furor from China’s leaders, Congress and the White House stood firm in presenting the gold medal to the Tibetan leader. In fact, the gold medal ceremony marked the first time a sitting US president appeared with the Dalai Lama in public.

Pelosi said Bush has continued to speak to her about that occasion.

“When we had the anniversary of Selma, the 50th anniversary of Selma, President Bush came, and I went to see him in his closed area before he came out to speak,” Pelosi recalled. “He said, ‘Every time I see you, I think of when we were together to give His Holiness the Congressional Gold Medal. The Chinese never [let] me forget it. But it was one of my proudest days.’”

Richard Gere, ICT’s chairman, said the gold medal ceremony honored the American people.

“I felt so proud that the American experiment was embracing the Dalai Lama into the hierarchy of deities of our democracy,” he said. “It was like he was giving us an award rather than us giving him an award.

“He embraced us into his heart and this American experiment into his heart. And I think everyone in that room felt refreshed and rededicated to this extraordinary experiment of the United States of America.”

[Watch highlights of the celebration!](#)



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