



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

New US Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues continues US State Department bipartisan tradition of celebrating the start of Losar

<https://savetibet.org/new-us-special-coordinator-for-tibetan-issues>

February 17, 2026

The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) warmly welcomes US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's appointment of Mr. Riley M. Barnes, [the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor](#), to serve as the US Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, and thanks Special Coordinator Barnes for hosting the State Department's annual celebration of Losar, Tibetan New Year, on February 17, 2026.

Assistant Secretary Barnes has held several senior positions at the State Department, and previously visited Dharamsala, India, to meet with Tibetan leaders in 2019 and 2025.

ICT appreciates Secretary Rubio publicly marking the beginning of Losar and is grateful for Special Coordinator Barnes's warm remarks to the Tibetan people, which connected Tibet to global peace and prosperity and US national security. The Losar celebration was co-planned by ICT and the Capital Area Tibetan Association.

"The Special Coordinator position represents the decades-long bipartisan US commitment to the people of Tibet, and this role is critical for bringing that commitment to life through advocating for Tibetans' human rights and their meaningful autonomy, in coordination with the entire US government and its partners," said ICT President Tencho Gyatso. "I congratulate Assistant Secretary Barnes on his appointment. ICT looks forward to partnering with him to advance the fundamental freedoms of Tibetans, preserve their culture and identity, and break the impasse in the Sino-Tibetan dialogue process."

Namgyal Choedup, the Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in North America, said, "I'm glad to see the new Special Coordinator is someone with a true interest in, and commitment to, Tibet. Mr. Barnes expressed his support for our people during his earlier visit to Dharamsala, and we are ready to get to work with him and his staff."

Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues position

The Special Coordinator plays a vital role in coordinating American support for Tibet. Created by the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002, the position is primarily responsible for promoting [meaningful dialogue on Tibetan autonomy](#) between the People's Republic of China and His Holiness the [Dalai Lama](#) or his representatives; protecting the unique [religious](#), cultural and [linguistic](#) identity of Tibetans; pressing China to respect the human rights of the Tibetan people; promoting access to Tibet; coordinating US efforts to address the [humanitarian needs of Tibetan refugees](#); promoting sustainable economic development and [environmental conservation on the Tibetan Plateau](#); and countering China's disinformation on Tibet and the institution of the Dalai Lama.

Previous Special Coordinators established a legacy of advances for US Tibet policy. At the same time, however, ICT has noted the relative paucity of new initiatives to push China to resume dialogue with the Tibetan side in recent years. Assistant Secretary Barnes should be prepared to push for stronger, more consistent, and more public advocacy to revive the dialogue process. ICT also urges Assistant Secretary Barnes to work with Tibetan partners in the CTA and likeminded allies to galvanize international support for a Tibetan-led succession process for His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in the face of China's stated intention to interfere in and co-opt the Dalai Lama's succession.

In September 2025, Sen. Jacky Rosen (D-NV) and Sen. John Curtis (R-NV) sent a [bipartisan letter](#) to Secretary of State Marco Rubio calling for the appointment of a Special Coordinator as soon as possible. The position had been vacant since January 2025.



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