



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

State Dept. supports reciprocal access to Tibet, and Congress rejects China's authority to choose new Dalai Lama

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The US Department of State supports the goals of the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act and will take steps to implement the bill if it becomes law, a department official said at a hearing today.

During the same hearing, a US Senator stated that Congress would reject a Chinese-appointed reincarnation of the Dalai Lama.

“I think it's clear that this Congress would not recognize a Chinese imposition” of a new Dalai Lama, said Sen. Cory Gardner (R-Colo.), who presided today, Dec. 4, 2018, over the hearing titled “The China Challenge, Part 3: Democracy, Human Rights, and the Rule of Law.”

The hearing brought together members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific and International Cybersecurity Policy, as well as representatives from the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Supporting reciprocal access

Mentioning the [Tibetan Policy Act of 2002](#), which requires American officials to visit Tibet on a regular basis, Gardner said very few American diplomats have been able to enter Tibet—a historically independent country that China has occupied for almost 70 years—because [the Chinese government refuses to give them access, just as it also denies access to Tibet for American journalists and tourists](#), as well as citizens from around the world.

Gardner asked Laura Stone, acting deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs at the State Department, what level of access to Tibet her agency has received over the past three years.

While Stone said she would have to look into that and get back to him, she told Gardner that: “I do want to state very clearly that I do understand the Senate is considering the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act. We do want to continue to work very closely with Congress and with your staff with the goal of seeing that Americans do have access to Tibet.”

Implementing the bill

The Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act—which takes aim at China’s unfair policy of banning Americans from Tibet, even though Chinese officials travel freely throughout the US—was [unanimously approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last week](#). It now needs to pass the full Senate and be signed into law by President Trump.

The bill requires the State Department to identify the Chinese officials responsible for keeping Americans out of Tibet. The Secretary of State will then ban those officials from receiving visas to enter the US.

Gardner, [one of 14 Senate cosponsors of the bill](#), noted that “Chinese officials who purport to represent Tibet have been freely coming to the United States.”

He asked Stone if the State Department shares the goals of the legislation. She said yes, and when Gardner asked if the department would work to implement the bill, she replied, “Of course.”

China can’t select new Dalai Lama

According to Tibetan Buddhist tradition, when the current Dalai Lama passes away, he will reincarnate as another person.

In a gross subversion of religious freedom, the Chinese government has claimed that it alone has the right to decide who the reincarnated Dalai Lama is.

Along with saying that Congress would reject China’s choice, Gardner asked Stone how the US government would respond.

Stone said the US has a clear position that religious decisions should be made by religious organizations, not by political regimes. She added that there is wide support for that position among the US public.

Stone told Gardner: “The fact that you’re asking that question is an important signal in itself to the Chinese government that this is the kind of issue that we are watching very closely and at very senior levels.”

Preserving the Tibetan way of life

In addition to Gardner, Sens. Tim Kaine (D-Va.), Ed Markey (D-Mass.) and Marco Rubio (R.-Fla.) all spoke at the meeting in support of the Tibetan people and their struggle for democracy and human rights.

Gloria Steele, acting assistant administrator in the Bureau for Asia at USAID, told the hearing that her agency partners with Tibetans to help them preserve their culture, sustain their livelihoods and conserve their environments.

USAID has helped preserve nearly 7 million Tibetan cultural heritage items; trained teachers in modern methods, benefiting more than 21,000 students at 75 Tibetan schools in India and Nepal; and bolstered the public leadership skills of more than 330 Central Tibetan Administration staff, Steele said.

USAID has also launched a pilot program to help government vendors sustain or grow their businesses through small, low-interest loans.

In the 2017 fiscal year, the program helped more than 800 microenterprises with a 100 percent on-time repayment rate, Steele said.

[Watch the full hearing.](#)