



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

House Judiciary Committee unanimously approves Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act

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The Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act took a big step forward today when the House Judiciary Committee approved the bill unanimously. The next step is for the act to move to the floor of the House of Representatives.

One by one, committee members spoke up at this morning's hearing in support of the bipartisan legislation, which seeks to ensure that Americans are given the same access to Tibet that Chinese citizens have to the United States.

"Moving this bill is the right thing to do," said Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.), chairman of the committee. "It is time that Congress take a stand with regard to access by foreign nationals to the Tibetan regions."

Goodlatte also quoted International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) President Matteo Mecacci, who noted in a recent report that the Chinese government is trying to restrict access to Tibet to a degree that exceeds even North Korea, where at least some foreign media are based. By contrast, international journalists, diplomats and civilians are almost always denied access to Tibet, a historically independent nation that China has occupied for nearly 70 years and rules with an iron fist.

Under the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, Chinese officials responsible for discriminating against Americans who try to enter Tibet would be banned from entering the United States.

"If Chinese officials, journalists and other citizens are able to travel freely in this country, it's only fair that their American counterparts are able to do the same," Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.) said.

Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.), ranking member of the Committee, said that the bill is important because it can help expose human rights violations taking place in Tibet.

"For Tibetans, restricted access to the region leaves them in virtual isolation from the rest of the world," Nadler said, "while also precluding international witnesses to the Chinese government's continuous violations of the Tibetans' human rights," which include arbitrary arrests, torture, heightened surveillance and severe restrictions on religious freedom.

Rep. Steve Chabot (R-Ohio) warned that "China is seeking to undermine the rules-based international order virtually every day." Although China tries to keep the rest of the world out of Tibet, the Chinese government is sending a growing number of state delegations to Western countries and creating new state-controlled media outlets in capitals around the globe, including Washington D.C.

Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D.-Calif.) said the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act would help make sure China's relationship with the U.S. is fair and reciprocal.

The bill, which was introduced by Reps. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.) and Randy Hultgren (R-Ill.), now has more than 50 co-sponsors in the House. A companion bill was also introduced in the Senate by Sen. Rubio (R. – Fl.) and Sen. Baldwin (D. Wis.), and has now 8 co-sponsors.

In addition, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo recently expressed support for reciprocal access to Tibet for Americans in his statements to the House and Senate Foreign Affairs Committees.

Mecacci, ICT's president, commented on today's vote saying, "Today's unanimous approval is an important first step that confirms the strong bipartisan support for the Tibetan people in the US Congress. This vote sends a strong message to the Chinese government, warning them that restricted access to Tibet will not be tolerated, and that access to Tibet is a strategic interest of the United States. We will continue to work with the House of Representatives and the Senate for the swift approval of this bill."