



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Congressional letters urge action from Biden Tibet coordinator

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The Biden administration’s presumptive Tibet coordinator should push for a meeting between President Biden and the Dalai Lama, fully implement US laws on Tibet, end the practice of calling Tibet part of China and more, over 60 members of Congress say in new Senate and House bipartisan letters.

The letters to Under Secretary of State Uzra Zeya are the latest sign of Congress’ intensifying interest in Tibet, a historically independent country that the Chinese government has brutally occupied for over 60 years. Zeya’s appointment as special coordinator for Tibetan issues in the State Department is expected soon.

Marco Rubio, R-Fla., and Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., in the Senate and Jim McGovern, D-Mass., and Chris Smith, R-NJ, in the House led the letters. The broad, diverse and bipartisan swath of signers demonstrated once again Congress’ steadfast support for His Holiness the Dalai Lama, religious freedom and basic human rights.

“These letters provide a vital framework for the next special coordinator to address China’s oppression in Tibet while making it clear that Congress expects the Biden administration to act quickly and meaningfully to support the Tibetan people,” said Franz Matzner, government relations director of the International Campaign for Tibet, an advocacy group with offices in Washington, DC and Europe.

“At a time when Freedom House has declared Tibet the least-free country on Earth alongside Syria, ICT thanks the 38 senators and 27 representatives who signed onto these letters and showed crucial leadership on the Tibetan issue. We look forward to working with the next special coordinator and encourage her to use these letters to advance US policy on Tibet.”

What the letters say

Zeya currently serves as under secretary of state for civilian security, democracy and human rights—a position that has traditionally doubled as the special coordinator. The Tibetan Policy Act of 2002 mandates the appointment of the special coordinator.

The letters to Zeya list 10 areas where Congress and the Biden administration can work together on Tibet, including:

- Engaging with the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration, which provides democratic governance for Tibetans in exile. The letters suggest that President Biden invite the Dalai Lama to the Oval Office—as several of his predecessors have done—or meet with him in his exile home of India, among other options.
- Resisting China’s attempts to interfere in the Dalai Lama’s succession. The Chinese government plans to appoint its own successor to the 86-year-old Tibetan spiritual leader. But the Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2020 states that only the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Buddhist community can decide on his succession. The letters urge the administration to “work with like-minded governments” to “affirm this principle as the international norm,” as the TPSA requires.
- Demanding access to Tibet. The letters call on Zeya to implement fully the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018, which pushes for access to Tibet for US journalists, diplomats and ordinary citizens. The letters ask Zeya to follow through on Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s promise to establish a Tibet

unit in the US Embassy in Beijing. They also affirm the Congress members' interest in opening a US consulate in Lhasa, Tibet's capital, as the TPSA encourages.

- Putting Tibetans back at the table. The last round of Sino-Tibetan dialogue took place over a decade ago. Since then, the Chinese government has refused further talks, insisting that the Dalai Lama first agree to unreasonable preconditions. The letters say, "We encourage the US government to engage earnestly with both sides, like-minded partners, and experts to explore novel strategies that could produce forward movement" on resuming talks.
- Changing language on Tibet's status. In a break from past reports, the State Department's 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices do not refer to Tibetan areas as "part of the People's Republic of China." The Congress members urge the State Department to continue excluding that phrase, both to promote dialogue without preconditions and to show respect for Tibetans' rights and history.

The letters also call for support of Tibetan political prisoners, Tibetan refugees in Nepal, Tibetan language and culture, and more.



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