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Tiananmen at 25 Must Reenergize Struggle for Human Rights in China

*By U.S. Rep. Chris Smith
Event in Remembrance of Tiananmen Square
Excerpts of Remarks
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This week and next, the world remembers the extraordinary sacrifice by hundreds of thousands of peaceful Chinese democracy activists who rallied on Tiananmen Square—and in over 400 cities in China—for almost two months in 1989 in their heroic quest to be free.

While some may prefer to look beyond or past or even trivialize the wanton slaughter by Chinese soldiers, the memory of the dead and wounded as well as the plight of the jailed and tortured requires us to honor them, respect their noble aspirations for fundamental freedoms and recommit to the struggle.

Twenty five years ago, a generation of young Chinese believed that there was a serious chance that their government would greet them with the open hand of friendship, understanding and empathy rather than a clenched fist. They believed that systemic reform was possible and would eventually replace dictatorship.

The beatings, bayonetting, torture and murder of students and the ubiquitous display of tanks turned that dream of freedom into a bloody nightmare. Despite its vaunted economic and military gains, the ugly spirit of government repression Tiananmen-like continues today unabated—often behind closed doors—throughout China.

China's government remains one of the most egregious offenders of human rights in the world. Torture is endemic, religious believers—Christians, Uighurs, Tibetan Buddhists and Falun Gong practitioners—are persecuted with absolute impunity. Hundreds of millions of women have been forced to abort their precious babies because of the draconian one child per couple policy. As a direct result of sex-selection abortion, tens of millions of girls are missing—

exterminated—a gender crime without precedent and a leading cause of an explosion in sex trafficking.

But violence and abuse need not be forever. Human history is filled with examples of dictatorships that matriculated to democracy because courageous people refused to capitulate or stand down.

The 25th anniversary of the infamous crackdown on student dissent therefore must re-inspire, reenergize and reprioritize the struggle for human rights and freedom in China.

Someday, China will be free. And the courage, valor, vision and tenacity of the Tiananmen Square activists—and all those who bravely struggled for freedom—will someday be celebrated in Beijing.