



“Hong Kong’s Summer of Discontent and U.S. Policy”

Excerpts of remarks by Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ)
Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC)

Tuesday, September 17, 2019, 10 a.m.
419 Dirksen Senate Office Building

It’s been a long, hot, summer in Hong Kong.

The inspiring protests there are a daily reminder of the stark differences between free and authoritarian societies. The people of Hong Kong have shown us again that a free people will not easily accept the boot of repression without protest.

The millions of Hong Kong protestors have also done the world a great service.

They have exposed Beijing’s plans to erode freedoms guaranteed to the people of Hong Kong by international treaty. They have exposed Beijing’s pernicious and repressive behavior.

And make no doubt about it, the Chinese Communist government is both uniquely repressive and incredibly paranoid about maintaining its grip on power.

There are over a million Uyghurs interned in Orwellian political education camps. Human rights lawyers have disappeared and been horribly tortured in detention. Christians, Tibetans, labor activists, and journalists face egregious abuse and the most intrusive system of surveillance operating the world today.

Why would anyone want their political fate determined by Beijing? *If given a choice, no one would.*

As inspiring as the protests have been, they have also raised serious concerns about the actions of the Hong Kong and Chinese Communist governments.

The violence and use of force perpetrated against the protestors by thugs and police is extremely alarming.

Representative McGovern (D-MA) and I were the first members of Congress to call on the Trump Administration to suspend the sale of tear gas, rubber bullets, pepper spray and other crowd control equipment to the Hong Kong Police. Its time to quickly pass the PROTECT Hong Kong Act the Chairman McGovern and I introduced last week.

Also alarming are the repeated and irresponsible threats of intervention made by Chinese officials, particularly so, given that this year marks the 30th Anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre.

The Hong Kong and Chinese Communist governments alone responsible for the grievances expressed by the protestors and they alone can peacefully end the protests by addressing demands for universal suffrage and investigation of police tactics.

Blaming the U.S. government—and this Congress—for the protests is cowardly propaganda and not befitting a nation such as China with aspirations of global leadership.

It is time for U.S. policy to respond to Beijing's long-term ambitions in Hong Kong and pass the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act.

Five years ago, I introduced the bipartisan Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act with my CECC Cochair Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH). The bill allows for more flexible and robust U.S. responses to the steady erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy and human rights.

Over the years, Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) and I upgraded the bill to reflect the kidnapping of booksellers, the disqualification of elected lawmakers, and the political prosecutions of Joshua Wong, Nathan Law, Benny Tai and others.

However, every time we pushed for passage there was opposition from diplomats, experts, committee Chairs, and the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong.

We were told not to upset the status quo. We were told that upgrading US policy would undermine their efforts with Beijing and its hand-selected political leaders in Hong Kong. We were told our bill would cost U.S. businesses.

It is the same advice that we have been hearing on China since the 1990s. China experts have failed the American people and their advice helped gut parts of our economy. Their advice this time will fail the people of Hong Kong as well.

Specifically, the *Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act* would

- Direct the Secretary of State to certify to Congress annually whether Hong Kong continues to deserve special treatment under U.S. law different from mainland China in such matters as trade, customs, sanctions enforcement, law enforcement cooperation, and protection of human rights and the rule of law.
- Direct the State Department not to deny entry visas based on the applicants' arrest or detention for participating in nonviolent protest activities in Hong Kong.
- Require an annual report from the Commerce Department on whether the Hong Kong government adequately enforces U.S. export controls and sanctions laws.
- Require the Secretary of State to submit a strategy to Congress to protect U.S. citizens and businesses in Hong Kong from the erosion of autonomy and the rule of law because of actions taken by the Chinese Communist governments.
- Require the President to identify and sanction persons in Hong Kong or in mainland China responsible for the erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy and serious abuses of human rights.

We have wide agreement for passage of this bipartisan and bicameral legislation.

I've heard it said that "the business of Hong Kong is business", but it is clear to me now that the business of Hong Kong is freedom. The people of Hong Kong are working to protect the rights and rule of law that are the foundation of the city's prosperity and unique vitality.

Let's be absolutely clear, we stand united with the people of Hong Kong and will not be silent in the face of threats to their guaranteed liberties and way of life.

The U.S. and the international community also cannot be silent. The whole world has a stake in a peaceful and just resolution in Hong Kong and the survival of the "One Country, Two Systems" model.