

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 17, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

In June, His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited Washington. Prior to his meeting with you, he came to Capitol Hill, where he spoke of his genuine friendship with Members of Congress, thanked the United States for its staunch support for Tibet over many decades, and described America as the leading nation in the free world. It was an honor and a pleasure to be in his company, but his visit was also a reminder of how little progress has been made in addressing the grievances of the Tibetan people. It is for this reason that we write to ask that you redouble efforts in support of the Tibetan people during your remaining months in office.

Since the 1980s, the Congress has often spoken out for the Tibetan people. The purpose of the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002 (TPA), the principal legislation guiding U.S. policy toward Tibet, is “to support the aspirations of the Tibetan people to safeguard their distinct identity” through substantive dialogue between the government of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Dalai Lama or his representatives. The position of Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues established by the TPA is called upon to “vigorously promote the policy of seeking to protect the distinct religious, cultural, linguistic, and national identity of Tibet,” and to press for “improved respect for human rights.” Last summer, the Congress passed House Resolution 337, which recognized the Dalai Lama’s 80th birthday and reaffirmed the TPA policy framework, calling on the U.S. government to redouble its efforts to encourage substantive dialogue, stalled since 2010, and to oppose PRC interference in the reincarnation process.

The State Department’s next annual report to the Congress on Tibet negotiations in the framework of the TPA is due shortly. But unfortunately, we can already anticipate the content: meetings and conversations will have been held, including your June meeting with the Dalai Lama, high-level public and private statements will have been made, and note may be taken of State Department reports that document the human rights situation in Tibetan areas of China. But in the end, the dialogue will not have resumed and no concrete achievements will be identified.

We understand that it is the government of the PRC, not that of the United States, that is the principle obstacle to progress on redressing the grievances of the Tibetan people. But as the Dalai Lama celebrates his 81st birthday, our concern about the future is growing.

During his meetings on the Hill, His Holiness recalled the Tibetan commitment to non-violence and reiterated that his people are seeking autonomy within, not independence from,

China. He emphasized that the philosophy underpinning Tibetan Buddhism has much to offer China and the world, and spoke at length about the global environmental importance of the Tibetan plateau. He contrasted the democratic practices of the Tibetan people with the wartime mentality and the immense corruption that have infected China's approach to governance. We believe his words suggest new opportunities that could be pursued within the framework of the TPA.

First, the U.S. government should invite the Dalai Lama to every event, on every occasion, where his knowledge and decades of reflections would be helpful for addressing the world's problems. The Dalai Lama is a world spiritual and philosophical leader who is well-positioned to contribute to global debates on religious tolerance and countering violent extremism, on the conceptual foundations and uses of non-violence, and on building peace in war-torn countries, among other topics. Tibetan Buddhists should be included in U.S.-supported initiatives to foster cross-cultural understanding and tolerance.

Second, the U.S. government should facilitate the involvement of the Dalai Lama or his representatives in the global debate on climate change and its potential consequences. Climate change, one of the few topics on which the U.S. and China have found common ground, is of great concern for Tibet, given its fragile environment, rapid warming, and critically important reserves of freshwater. For its part, the Chinese leadership has acknowledged at the highest levels the scale of the environmental crisis it faces. Conserving the Tibetan plateau is surely a shared interest, one that can only be achieved with the full participation of the Tibetan people within and outside China.

Third, the transnational democratic experience of the Central Tibet Administration (CTA) should be highlighted in U.S. government initiatives that promote democratic governance. The CTA's recent elections, in which Dr. Lobsang Sangay was reelected as Sikyong and the 45-member Assembly of the Tibetan People's Deputies was selected, were carried out over several months in more than 30 countries with the participation of tens of thousands of people. This electoral process stands in sharp contrast to China's authoritarian practices and offers an interesting, innovative model in an increasingly globalized world.

Mr. President, we welcome your expressions of support for the preservation of Tibet's unique religious, cultural and linguistic traditions, and the equal protection of human rights of Tibetans in China, and your recognition of Dalai Lama's efforts to raise awareness of the importance of limiting global warming, including protecting the Himalayan glaciers and environment on the Tibetan plateau. But we believe it is critically important to move beyond words to actions.

Initiatives like those we have described that underscore the relevance of the Tibetan experience for world affairs should complement renewed and more robust efforts to fully implement the TPA. In this regard, we strongly encourage your Administration, during the remaining months of your term in office, to focus on establishing a consular office in Lhasa. Such a presence is critical for observing and addressing the obstacles to freedom of movement that affect both Tibetans within China, and U.S. citizens, including Tibetan-Americans, who seek to travel to Tibetan areas of China.

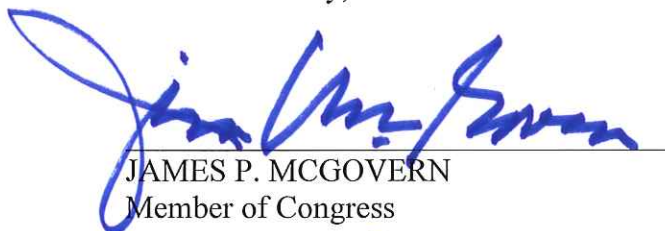
As you are surely aware, although the U.S. government allows journalists and other citizens of the PRC to travel freely within the United States, the Chinese government restricts the access of U.S. officials, journalists, Tibetan-Americans and other citizens to Tibetan areas of the country. Legislation pending in Congress would address this problem by making those senior Chinese officials responsible for the policy ineligible to receive visas to enter the United States, on the premise that reciprocity forms the basis of diplomatic engagement between countries. Pending passage of such legislation, nothing precludes your Administration from implementing a policy of reciprocity now, or tying Chinese access to United States territory to the opening of a consular presence in Lhasa.

In addition, the U.S. government should publicly support the right of the Dalai Lama to return to Tibet. In accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which China voted for in 1948, everyone has the right to leave and return to his own country.

Finally, we strongly urge you to publically and regularly call for the immediate and unconditional release of all Tibetan political prisoners held by the PRC whose cases have been documented by the Congressional-Executive Commission on China.

Mr. President, the Tibetan people view the United States as their friend. It is time to honor that friendship with new, creative strategies to encourage meaningful dialogue, protect Tibetan rights, and preserve their unique cultural, religious and linguistic identity. We respectfully request that you exercise your leadership on this matter.

Sincerely,



JAMES P. MCGOVERN
Member of Congress



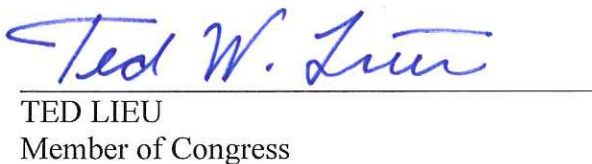
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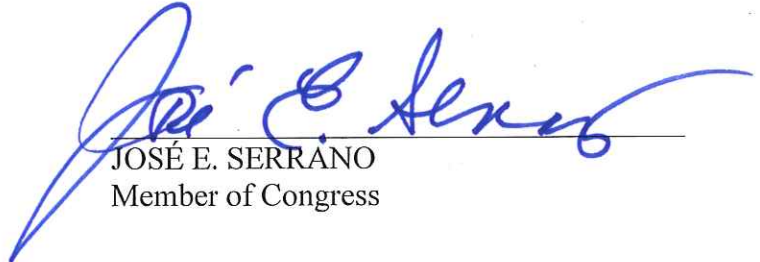

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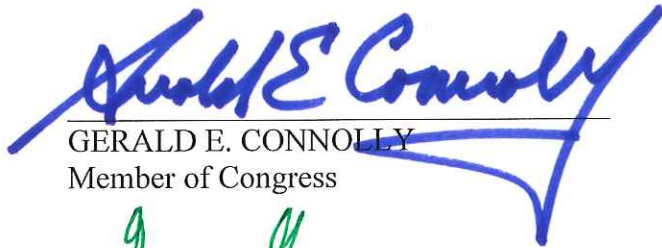

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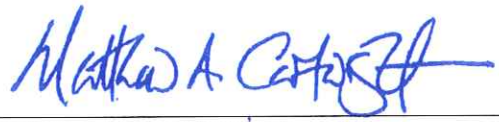

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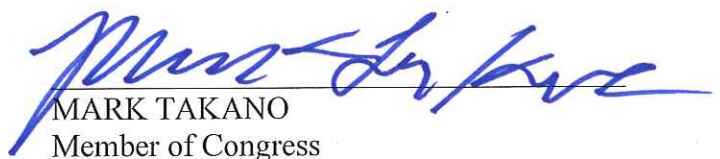
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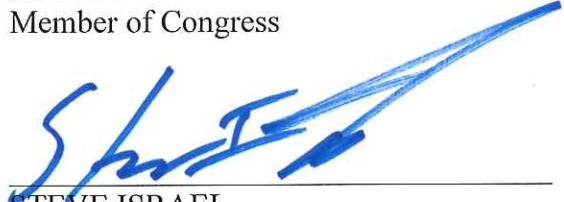
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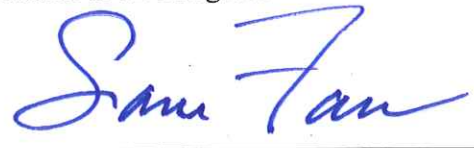
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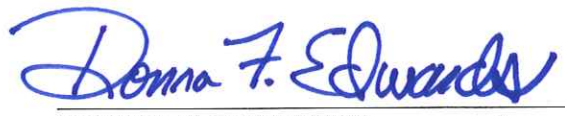
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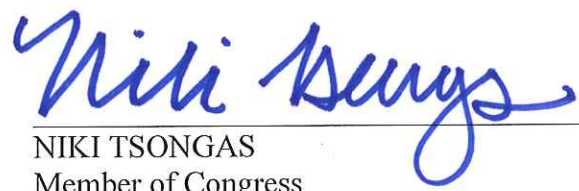
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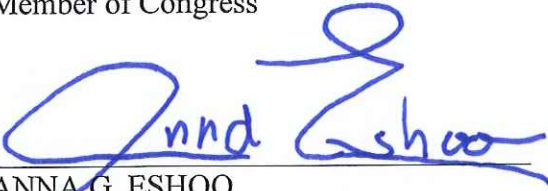
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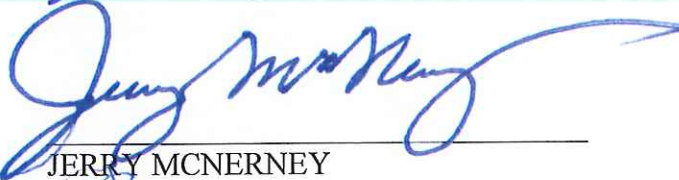
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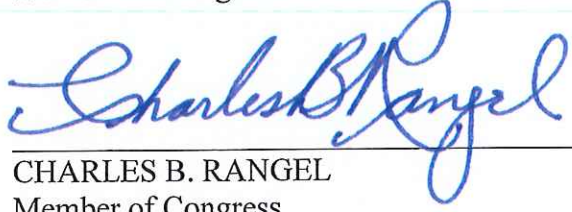
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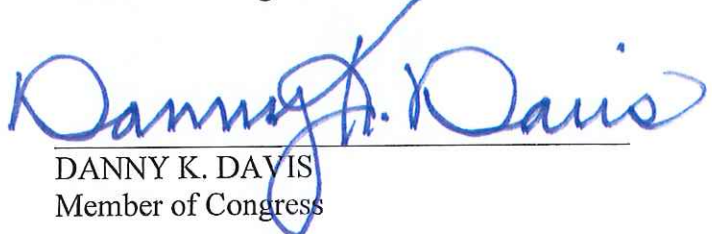
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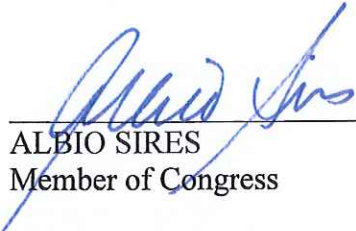
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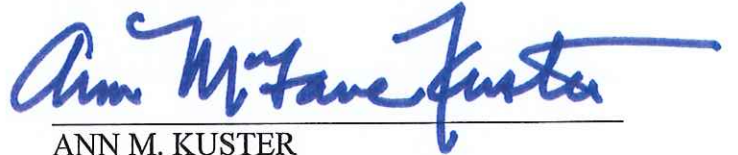
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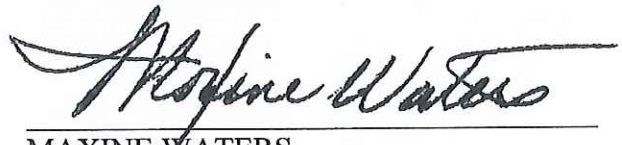
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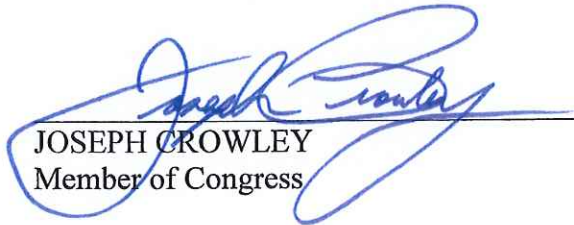
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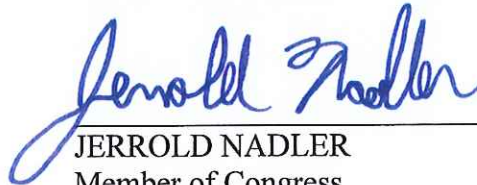
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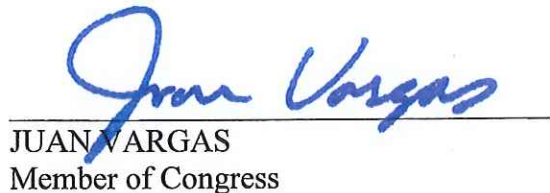
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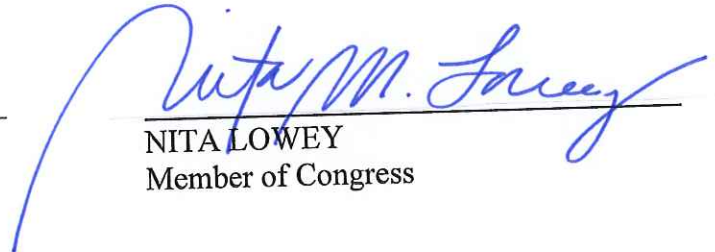
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