

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hearing

on

CECC at 20: Two Decades of Human Rights Abuse and Defense in China

Tuesday, December 13, 2022 – 10:00 a.m.

106 Dirksen Senate Office Building & Virtual via Cisco Webex

Statement of Senator Jeff Merkley

Chair

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

- Good morning. Today's hearing of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China on "CECC at 20: Two Decades of Human Rights Abuse and Defense in China" will come to order.
- This year marked the start of the Commission's third decade monitoring the People's Republic of China's compliance with international human rights standards and developments related to the rule of law in China. The Commission's annual report, hearings, and other products provide a detailed multi-year accounting.
- Over that time, our work documents a dramatic arc, from the early 2000s of a movement within China to stand up for and defend human rights to the current situation, the Chinese Communist Party's escalating efforts to constrict space for internet freedom, civil society and the exercise of citizens' basic rights. In that same period, the hope some held on to that China's inclusion in global institutions would be accompanied by improvements in human rights has met the harsh reality: Chinese authorities are using those institutions to debase and discredit the very notion of universal rights.
- As we close out the 117th Congress, this hearing aims to take stock of where the last two decades leave us and where those fighting for fundamental freedoms can go from here. We are joined by some of the leading experts in the field, who will shed light on the evolution of the domestic situation in China, the international legal landscape, and the Chinese Communist Party's efforts to shape both.
- Before we hear their testimony, our examination of this topic will be framed by special remarks from a very special friend to this Commission. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi spoke from the dais at the first hearing of the CECC 20 years ago, just a floor above us in this very building, to help launch a Commission she had played a key role in creating. As we thank her for her historic leadership in Congress and tireless work on behalf of human rights everywhere, but especially in China, there is nobody more fitting for us to hear from to mark two decades of the Commission's work and to help chart what we can do to keep fighting for the people against the powerful.

- That is the essence of what the Commission tries to do. The talented and professional staff have published 21 annual reports, compiled over 10,000 Political Prisoner Database records, and met with countless stakeholders over the years. In this Congress alone, we've passed the groundbreaking Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, advanced legislation establishing a China Censorship Monitor and Action Group; held 15 hearings that ran the gamut on issues within our mandate, sent dozens of advocacy letters, and published analysis on the treatment of Muslim minorities, economic coercion against American companies, the case for sanctioning those responsible for political prosecutions, and the dismantling of Hong Kong's civil society.
- Since its first days, the backbone for all of this work has been Judy Wright. The first person hired to staff the CECC, Judy Wright has been the only Director of Administration the Commission has ever had. After nearly 21 years in this role and almost 40 working for the U.S. Congress, Judy will begin a richly deserved retirement at the end of this month. She has kept the trains running on time, supported research staff through thick and thin, maintained institutional memory over the many political transitions in Congress over the years, and been a treasured friend to generations of CECC staffers and commissioners. Judy, this team will miss you dearly. We wish you all the best in retirement and thank you for your service.
- This is my last hearing as chair before we transition to the next Congress. It has been an honor to serve with my cochair, Congressman McGovern, who has shown tremendous leadership these last four years in translating the work of the Commission into meaningful legislation defending Uyghurs, Hong Kongers, Tibetans, and others experiencing abuse. That work has been truly bipartisan and bicameral, and as we prepare for the next Congress, I look forward to continued close partnership with Congressman Smith, with Senator Rubio, and all of this Commission's champions for human rights and the rule of law in China.