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**Congressional-Executive Commission on China**

**Hong Kong’s Future in the Balance:**

**Eroding Autonomy and Challenges to Human Rights**

**May 15, 2019**

***Representative Chris Smith***

***CECC Commissioner***

 Thank you, Chairman McGovern and Cochair Rubio for holding this hearing. You are both true champions of human rights and I look forward to working with you on the CECC.

 Over the past five years, the CECC has shined a bright light on developments in Hong Kong. Senator Rubio and I and other Members of Congress introduced the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act and worked to reauthorize the State Department’s Annual Report on Hong Kong until 2024.

 **We plan to offer that bill again in this Congress** **and dare the American Chamber of Commerce to oppose it.**

 Beijing’s increasingly rough oversight of Hong Kong may not be as brutal as that pursued on the Mainland, but it is no less pernicious. The goal is eroding Hong Kong’s guaranteed freedoms and the rule law and intimidating those who try to defend them.

 Chinese President Xi Jinping has concentrated power and suppressed opposition in mainland China like no leader since Mao Zedong. He has turned his attention to Hong Kong and taken steps to stifle political participation and speech through extraordinary interventions in Hong Kong’s affairs.

 Within the last four years the Hong Kong government has taken many unprecedented and repressive steps.

* It has disqualified elected LegCo members,
* Prohibited individuals from running for office,
* Banned a political party,
* Jailed pro-democracy protest leaders (including Nathan Law who is here with us today),
* Expelled a Financial Times journalist,
* Did little when Beijing abducted Hong Kong residents.

 I agree with my colleagues and the witnesses here today. The U.S. and the international community *should be pushing back hard against the proposed extradition amendment.*

 *It is both saddening and maddening that the government of Hong Kong – which inherited a rule-of-law system – may soon be extraditing individuals to China, where “justice” is what is expedient to the Communist Party.*

 I was glad to see a recent statement from the U.S. State Department saying it was “disappointed” by the decision of the Hong Kong Government to prosecute and convict several Hong Kong residents for organizing peaceful protests during the Occupy Central movement in 2014.

 Let me say this, disappointment does not go far enough. In my opinion Benny Tai and Chan Kin-man and the others jailed for organizing peaceful protest should be considered political prisoners.

 **I never thought I would utter that phrase when it comes to Hong Kong, but these are among Hong Kong’s first political prisoners.**

 As part of the Lantos Human Rights Commission’s Defending Freedom’s Project, I will “adopt” them as political prisoners until they are released.

 In conclusion, let me say that it is in everyone’s interest that Hong Kong remain a free and prosperous bridge between China and the West.

 The city’s unique vitality and prosperity are rooted in its guaranteed freedoms and the rule of law.

 But if Hong Kong is to become just another Mainland Chinese city, we will have to reassess whether Hong Kong warrants special status under U.S. law.

 The arc of history does not bend toward justice without concerted action from all freedom-loving peoples.

 If the U.S. and the international community does not defend the rights and freedoms of Hong Kong’s citizens now, there is little hope that freedom can take root in Mainland China’s future.