



## **Rubio Co-chairs CECC Hearing on Hong Kong's Summer of Discontent and U.S. Policy Responses**

September 17, 2019

I want to thank all of our witnesses, especially those who are on the front lines and have even been jailed multiple times, and we'll hear from them today about the things that have been done against them and your commitment to freedom and democracy. It is inspiring. It really is inspiring for those of us who live in this republic. It reminds us of why so many of us serve here and what we seek to preserve around the world, and that's why we want to stand with you. Your fight, and the fight of your fellow Hong Kongers, is the fight of every human who yearns for liberty and dignity, and demands that their fundamental rights be respected and be upheld. Let me say at the outset that the people of Hong Kong: we stand with you. And by we, this is a bicameral, bipartisan commitment, as you will see today and have seen in the past few days on these efforts, across both political parties and every major figure. Not only that, but many Americans stand with you in your fight to keep your long-cherished freedoms.

It was only a few months ago, in May, that we held a hearing on Hong Kong. It was titled *Hong Kong's Future in the Balance: Eroding Autonomy and Challenges to Human Rights*. At that hearing, and even before, it was highlighted, on the facts, that the Chinese Communist Party has been eroding Hong Kong's autonomy and freedoms guaranteed by the joint declaration and by the Basic Law. The May hearing discussed the extradition bill, that, if it would have passed, would have exposed everyone in Hong Kong, and that includes by the way 80,000 Americans who reside there, would have exposed them to the justice system or the so-called "justice system" of the Chinese Communist Party. The same justice system that routinely tortures those in its custody, that denies critically needed medical care, that arrests lawyers for serving their clients, and that places the desires of the Communist Party above every and any demand for justice. The proposed bill exposed the very real and increasing threat to Hong Kong's autonomy. But few of us could have anticipated the events that would follow.

Since June, the people of Hong Kong have bravely taken to the streets for 15 straight weeks in more than 400 separate demonstrations involving more than 8 million people of every age and every background. Recently, there have been very credible reports that have emerged of the police's brutal treatment of demonstrators while in their custody. This weekend for example we saw images of the police holding down a protester whose head was bleeding and spraying into the wound on the head, pepper spray, which is an act of total cruelty. We watched the police throw tear gas grenades at journalists, many of whom are well far away from the demonstrators. Since the 21st of

July, pro-Beijing thugs — thugs associated with organized crime and the party's united front activities — have violently confronted demonstrators and journalists and innocent passersby. And the police just looked on, looked the other way, and in some cases, even cooperated. And while detained demonstrators have been beaten, or their faces smashed into the concrete, journalists have photographed these same thugs in “detention”, smoking and playing on their cell phones after attacking journalists and demonstrators.

Although Hong Kong's Chief Executive may have promised to withdraw the extradition bill when the legislative council reconvenes in October, the government's violent response to the demonstrations demands accountability. And yet, Lam and the Hong Kong government refuses to press for any accountability for the violence by Hong Kong's security forces that was committed and continues to be committed against peaceful protesters. The Chief Executive did not listen to the outcry against the bill in Hong Kong since its introduction, rather tried to ram it through the legislature.

So what's at stake? The Hong Kong government's stubbornness in the face of public outcry has launched one of the greatest people power movements we have witnessed in recent memory. The actions of the government and of the people demonstrate that there are two Hong Kongs. The Hong Kong of the government, totally leveraged by the Chinese government, has proven that it's not committed to a free and autonomous future for Hong Kong, nor is it one of rule of law or of justice. The other Hong Kong, the real one, is the one of its people: the students, and youth activists, artists, journalists, doctors and nurses, lawyers, accountants, business people — from every walk of life. The city's people of all ages who have shown us a Hong Kong with a vibrant civic life prepared to stand up for its own autonomy, democracy, and liberty. It is clear that these two very different Hong Kongs are colliding, and therefore the city is at a crossroads. The fact of the matter is that maintaining autonomy is critical to U.S. interests, and it also has real implications for the United States and the rest of the world. Hong Kong's status as an international trade and investment hub are just as threatened as long as the long-cherished freedoms of the Hong Kong people are being threatened. Threatened, by the way, not by us, but by the Communist Party of China.

So it is my belief that it's long overdue for the United States and the free world to respond. I hope we quickly pass the *Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act*, which I hope will be heard next week in committee, so that we can provide this, and future administrations, with updated tools to respond robustly and flexibly to the Chinese Communist Party and its proxies who are undermining Hong Kong's autonomy. The U.S. government and other democracies need to hold Chinese and Hong Kong officials accountable for their failure to uphold their commitments. The United States and other nations have options precisely because Beijing benefits from Hong Kong's special status; — a special status which has made Hong Kong an international financial center built on the promises that China made to the world with regards to Hong Kong, which they seek to break. China's leaders must either respect Hong Kong's autonomy or know that their escalating aggression will lead them to face real consequences — not just from the United States, but from the free world. And I issue one final warning in this regard: I anticipate fully they'll continue their work to turn the system of government in

Hong Kong to resemble more like the one that exists in Macao — one that allows them to intervene in the legal system as they wish. So we're here today to examine what has happened and look forward to Hong Kong's future. There are many challenges in our relationship with China, but Hong Kong must remain a priority. Hong Kong is not a Chinese internal affair and the world has a responsibility to help the people of Hong Kong move towards a future that protects their individual freedoms and provides for civic well-being. I look forward to hearing your views in today's discussion. I thank you for your courage and commitment.