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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

May 9, 2019

The Honorable Sam Brownback
Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

We write to express our shared belief that promoting religious freedom must remain a central pillar of U.S. foreign policy, and to draw your attention to the state of Tibetan Buddhism under Chinese rule.

In the 60 years since the Dalai Lama escaped to India in exile, the Chinese government has suppressed the religious freedom and cultural expression of Tibetan Buddhists, often brutally. A recent and troubling development is Chinese government's moves to claim sole authority over the issue of Tibetan reincarnation, particularly that of the Dalai Lama. We urge you to spearhead efforts by the U.S. government and international community to ensure the 15th Dalai Lama is chosen according to religious practice, and not subject to governmental interference by Beijing or any other government.

While we of course cannot serve as arbiters of Buddhist belief or rules on reincarnation, we strongly believe that as a matter of safeguarding their religious freedom, the Tibetan Buddhist community and the Dalai Lama must be able to determine reincarnation and succession as a community and without government interference.

Action by any government, including the Chinese government, to intervene or select the next Dalai Lama would undermine the legitimacy of a revered Tibetan Buddhist institution and deprive millions of Buddhist practitioners worldwide, including those in the United States, their legitimate spiritual leader and teacher. The United States has a direct interest in protecting the right of Buddhists to religious freedom, and to ensure their religious institutions, like those of all religions, are not undermined and able to operate freely.

We seek your thoughts and views on how the United States can best support Tibetan Buddhists, including collaboration with the international community to uphold internationally recognized religious freedoms and convey a clear and consistent message that Tibetan reincarnation – particularly that of the Dalai Lama – is a religious tradition that should not be subject to government encroachment.

The Honorable Sam Brownback

May 9, 2019

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We look forward to your thoughts, and to working with you on this important issue.

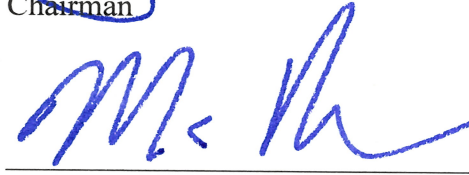
Sincerely,




JAMES E. RISCH
Chairman



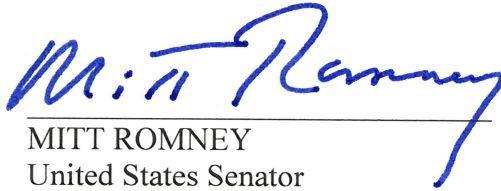
ROBERT MENENDEZ
Ranking Member



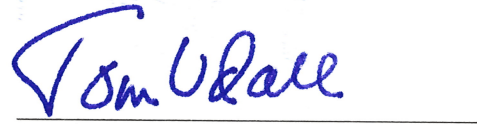
MARCO RUBIO
United States Senator



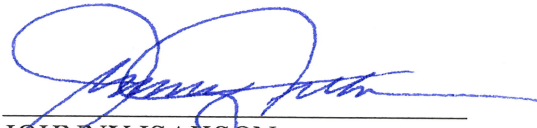
CORY GARDNER
United States Senator



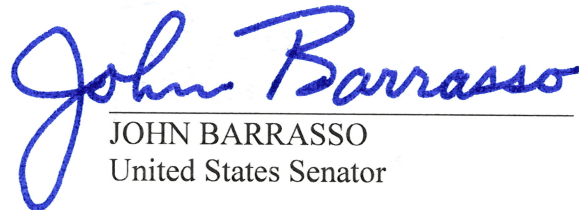
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United States Senator



TOM UDALL
United States Senator



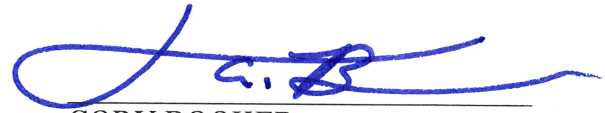
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