

Member Day Hearing Remarks for the Record**by Congressman Chris Smith (NJ-04)****December 11, 2025**

Mr. Chairman—

I'd like to discuss a few critical, bipartisan bills that advance core U.S. interests in protecting Americans unjustly detained overseas and countering the escalating threats to democracy worldwide.

H.R. 5491 – The Nelson Wells Jr. and Dawn Michelle Hunt Unjustly Detained Americans Act, cosponsored by Reps. Krishnamoorthi, French Hill, and Vindman, addresses the shocking and deeply troubling cases of two Americans recently taken and held under dubious charges abroad. These cases are real-time reminders that American citizens are being used as leverage and political pawns by authoritarian regimes.

This bill strengthens U.S. tools to:

- ensure fast, decisive action when Americans are unjustly detained overseas;
- increase pressure and accountability on governments engaging in hostage diplomacy;
- expand support and communication for affected families, who too often suffer in silence; and
- protect national security, as these detentions can erode U.S. leverage and credibility globally.

To further reinforce our stance against politically motivated persecution, I intend to combine this bill with two others to create a new bill or offer an amendment at markup to incorporate essential provisions from **H.R. 5303, the FREEDOM for Gao Zhisheng and All Political Prisoners Act**, which demands accountability for egregious human-rights violations of political prisoners in China, and globally—and **H.R. 2522, the Jimmy Lai Way Designation Act**, which honors the courageous fight for press freedom in Hong Kong by naming an intersection in the District of Columbia as “Jimmy Lai Way”, to honor his example for the fight for democracy.

Together, these measures form a unified strategy: America will not tolerate repression of democracy and fundamental human rights, nor the seizure of our citizens as bargaining chips.

H.R. 3225 – The Belarus Democracy, Human Rights, and Sovereignty Act of 2025, cosponsored by Reps Keating and Joe Wilson. This bill expands and modernizes existing authorities to counter the ongoing repression by the Lukashenka regime—one of Europe’s most brutal dictatorships. This legislation will act to:

- enhance sanctions against individuals and entities responsible for torture and election fraud;
- strengthen support for independent media, civil society, and pro-democracy activists;
- counter Russia’s malign influence and the forced erosion of Belarusian sovereignty; and
- align U.S. policy with transatlantic allies in defense of freedom and territorial integrity.

Advancing this legislation will send an unmistakable message of solidarity with the Belarusian people in their struggle for freedom, democratic governance, and national independence.

H.R. 4829 – The Transnational Repression Policy Act, cosponsored by Reps. McGovern and Holmes Norton, confronts the growing threat of authoritarian regimes cracking down on free speech while on U.S. soil and abroad—through intimidation, kidnapping, surveillance, cyber harassment, and even assassination. The bill ensures the U.S. government can:

- identify and penalize foreign officials engaged in repression beyond their borders;
- protect refugees and exiles targeted for their political beliefs; and
- strengthen U.S. coordination against these global abuses.

We must ensure that dictators cannot extend their reach into our communities.

H.R. 2661 – The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office Certification Act, cosponsored by Reps. McGovern and Moolenaar, addresses the exploitation of HKETO privileges granted under the assumption that Hong Kong enjoyed meaningful autonomy. Beijing has destroyed that autonomy, and this bill holds China to account by requiring a clear certification of independence before these special privileges continue.

This is about ensuring U.S. law reflects geopolitical reality—not the fiction imposed by the CCP.

H.R. 4830 – The Uyghur Genocide Accountability and Sanctions Act (UGASA), cosponsored by Reps. Suozzi and Moolenaar, enhances tools to identify and respond to human rights abuses in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region—including torture, extrajudicial killings, and exploitation. It reinforces targeted sanctions and accountability for the worst perpetrators, while supporting reforms that protect innocent civilians, especially the most vulnerable.

H.R. 1744 – The USCIRF Reauthorization Act, cosponsored by Reps. Sherman, Bilirakis, Cuellar, Suozzi, Lieu, and Crow, ensures that the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom—the world’s premier watchdog on religious liberty—can continue its indispensable mission. At a time of surging persecution of Christians, Muslims, Jews, Yazidis, and others, USCIRF’s voices and findings remain a lifeline for the oppressed.

Mr. Chairman, each of these measures responds directly to urgent threats—arbitrary detention, dictatorship, foreign repression, ideological targeting, and fundamental attacks on basic human dignity.

Thank you for considering these requests. My staff and I stand ready to support the Committee in advancing these bipartisan priorities to protect Americans and defend universal freedom.