



Senators Feinstein and Thomas Introduce Legislation to Award Congressional Gold Medal to the Dalai Lama

- Feinstein-Thomas bill has bipartisan support of 73 other senators -

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Washington, DC – U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Craig Thomas (R-Wyo.) today introduced legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to His Holiness, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, in recognition of his advocacy of peace, tolerance, human rights, non-violence, and compassion throughout the world. The bill has the bipartisan support of 73 other senators.

“The Dalai Lama has struggled for half a century to better the lives of the Tibetan people – armed only with his compassion, courage and conviction. In doing so, he has been a shining light to all those fighting for freedom around the world,” Senator Feinstein said. **“So I cannot say how much it means to me that three quarters of the Senate have put the daily battles aside to come together to say that this man deserves our nation’s highest civilian honor -- the Congressional Gold Medal. It is my hope that the Senate will pass this resolution soon.”**

“The Dalai Lama has been one of the leading voices in advocating for peace, tolerance, human rights, non-violence, and compassion throughout the globe. He has worked tirelessly for nearly 50 years to increase understanding between the Tibetan and Chinese people,” Senator Thomas said. **“In these difficult times, I believe it is important to recognize those who fight to bring people together.”**

For more than two centuries, Congress has expressed public gratitude on behalf of the nation for distinguished contributions through the occasional commissioning of individual struck gold medals in its name. This award, which initially was bestowed on military leaders, has also been given to such diverse individuals as Sir Winston Churchill and Bob Hope, George Washington and Robert Frost, Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa, and other Nobel Peace Laureates, such as Elie Wiesel and Nelson Mandela.

Under the rules, Congressional Gold Medals require the support of at least two-thirds of the Members of both the Senate and House of Representatives before they can be signed into law by the president.

The Feinstein-Thomas “Fourteenth Dalai Lama Congressional Gold Medal Act” must now be considered by the Senate Banking Committee before it can be brought to the Senate floor for final passage. Companion legislation has been introduced in the House of Representatives by Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) and Tom Lantos (D-Calif.).

Background on the 14th Dalai Lama

In 1959, the Dalai Lama fled his Tibetan homeland for neighboring India, where he established a government-in-exile. Since embracing the “Middle Way” approach in 1989, he has worked arduously to find a reasonable and peaceful solution that provides for cultural and religious autonomy for Tibetans, within the People’s Republic of China.

In 1989, the 14th Dalai Lama received the Nobel Peace Prize for his work to bring democracy and freedom to his people. In their recommendation, the Nobel Committee wrote: “The Committee wants to emphasize the fact that the Dalai Lama in his struggle for the liberation of Tibet consistently has opposed the use of violence. He has instead advocated peaceful solutions based upon tolerance and mutual respect in order to preserve the historical and cultural heritage of his people.”

In April 1991, Congress welcomed the Dalai Lama in a ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda that was attended by the entire Congressional leadership. When the Dalai Lama addressed the gathering, he reflected on a gift sent to him as a small boy in Tibet by President Franklin Roosevelt – a gold watch showing phases of the moon and the days of the week. “I marveled at the distant land which could make such a practical object so beautiful. But what truly inspired me were your ideas of freedom and democracy. I felt that your principles were identical to my own, the Buddhist beliefs in fundamental human rights freedom, equality, tolerance and compassion for all.”

The Dalai Lama has also made it his life work to promote harmony and respect among the different religious faiths of the world. In his own words: “I always believe that it is much better to have a variety of religions, a variety of philosophies, rather than one single religion or philosophy. This is necessary because of the different mental dispositions of each human being. Each religion has certain unique ideas or techniques, and learning about them can only enrich one’s faith.”

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