

US lawmakers seek action on Internet freedom

March 9 2010



People surfing the internet at a cafe in Beijing. US lawmakers from the two major parties on Tuesday issued a joint call for government action to ensure Internet freedom overseas amid alarm at China's cyber-censorship.

US lawmakers from the two major parties on Tuesday issued a joint call for government action to ensure Internet freedom overseas amid alarm at China's cyber-censorship.

Democratic Representative David Wu and Republican Representative Chris Smith announced they were inviting lawmakers into a bipartisan Global Internet Freedom Caucus to help push forward legislation.

Wu, a Chinese American from Oregon, said he was introducing legislation to set up a government-backed [Internet Freedom](#) Foundation to award competitive grants for researchers to develop technology to

circumvent censorship.

"While the spread of digital media technology is a tremendous force for good, it also faces a number of threats from those who seek to control information, quell dissent and censor non-violent free expression," Wu said.

"In an ever-changing digital world, we must work together to appeal to the better angels of our nature and strive not just for prosperity, but for freedom," he said.

Smith is the author of another bill being considered by Congress, the Global Online Freedom Act, that would prohibit US firms from assisting in cyber-censorship overseas.

If approved, employees of IT companies could face prison in the United States if they knowingly give information to a foreign government that causes a person to be harmed for peacefully expressing political or religious beliefs.

"It's become very clear -- and Google's recent difficulties in China underline this -- that IT companies are not powerful enough to stand up to repressive governments," Smith said.

"Without US government support, they are inevitably forced to play a role in the repressive government's censorship and surveillance," the New Jersey congressman said.

[Google](#) in January said it would no longer cooperate with China and consider pulling out of the fast-growing market after discovering attacks against dissidents' email accounts.

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Citation: US lawmakers seek action on Internet freedom (2010, March 9) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-03-lawmakers-action-internet-freedom.html>

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