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U.S. Senators Push New Laws Targeting China as Trump Focuses on Trade

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U.S. lawmakers from both major parties are proposing new legislation to challenge China's human rights record and growing international influence, even as President Donald Trump prioritizes trade negotiations with Beijing. The coordinated effort in Congress underscores a widening gap between the administration's economic approach and a more values-driven strategy supported by members of the Senate.

Three bills are being introduced with bipartisan backing. One would ban visas for Chinese officials involved in forcibly returning Uyghur Muslims to China. Another aims to strengthen U.S. support for Taiwan through diplomatic and economic ties. A third focuses on protecting dissidents and activists living abroad who are targeted by the Chinese Communist Party.

While the Trump administration continues to engage with China on trade, some lawmakers are concerned that broader security and human rights issues are being sidelined. Bonnie Glaser, a prominent Asia policy analyst, observed that “gaps are opening between approach to China and the approaches of some members of his team, as well as with Congress.”

Senator Jeff Merkley, a Democrat and co-sponsor of all three bills, emphasized the importance of standing firm against Beijing’s aggression. “The United States cannot afford to be weak in the face of the People’s Republic of China and its aggression around the world,” he said.

At the same time, Trump’s trade team recently held more than five hours of talks with Chinese officials in Stockholm. The goal was to extend a tariff truce set to expire on August 12. U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer described the talks as productive, though he tempered expectations about any immediate breakthroughs.

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick indicated the pause in tariffs could be extended, depending on progress in negotiations. However, some of the administration’s recent decisions, such as restrictions on the export of advanced electronic components to China, have raised concerns among national security experts. Critics argue such moves weaken the United States’ stance on controlling sensitive technologies.

As Trump pursues economic deals ahead of the presidential election, members of Congress are signalling that trade must not come at the expense of national security or moral leadership. The legislative push represents a rare moment of unity between Republicans and Democrats, reflecting a shared desire to hold Beijing accountable, even if it means challenging the White House's current direction.