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# U.S. House passes Hong Kong Rights Act

## It requires U.S. President to sanction those responsible for rights abuses in city; China slams the Bill

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WASHINGTON  
The U.S. House of Representatives passed a Bill on Tuesday sought by pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong that aims to defend civil rights in the semi-autonomous territory, prompting an angry response from China.

The Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, which will now move to the Senate before it can become law, has drawn rare bipartisan support in Congress.

The law would end the Hong Kong-U.S. special trading status unless the State Department certifies annually that city authorities are respecting human rights and the rule of law. China expressed "strong indignation" over the passing of the Act, which also requires the U.S. President to identify and sanction people who are responsible for the erosion of autonomy and serious abuses of rights in the city.

"What Hong Kong faces is not the so-called human rights and democracy issue as all, but the issue of stop-

ping violence, reinstating order and upholding the rule of law as soon as possible," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang in a statement.

Mr. Geng said the U.S. should "stop meddling" and warned China would take "strong measures" to counter the proposed Hong Kong Bill. The Act will now move to a similar vote in the Senate before it can become law.

"Today, we're simply urging the Chinese President and the Hong Kong Chief Executive, Carrie Lam, to faithfully honour the government's promises" that Hong Kong's rights and autonomy would be protected, Republican Representative Chris Smith, prime sponsor of the Bill, said on Tuesday on the House floor.

**'External forces'**  
China has frequently accused "external forces" of fueling weeks of unrest in the global financial hub.

Millions have taken to the streets of Hong Kong, initially against a now-dropped bid by its leaders to allow extra-



Under fire: Carrie Lam leaving the legislature after being heckled by pro-democracy lawmakers in Hong Kong. •AFP

ditions to the authoritarian Chinese mainland. The movement has expanded in the territory where activists say freedoms are being eroded by Beijing, despite being written into a deal that governed Hong Kong's 1997 transfer to China from British colonial rule.

"The House just sent a strong message to the people of Hong Kong: We stand with you in the fight for democracy and justice," said Ben Ray

Lujan, a House Democrat. Republican House member Mario Diaz-Balart said the Act ensures "that the special relationship with Hong Kong endures only as long as Hong Kong retains the autonomy and freedoms that justify that special relationship."

The House also approved, by a voice vote, a related Bill to prohibit the export of certain non-lethal crowd control items such as tear gas to Hong Kong.

# Lam abandons policy address after protest

REUTERS  
HONG KONG

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam had to abandon her policy speech in the legislature on Wednesday because of jeering lawmakers.

Ms. Lam, who had to broadcast the annual address via a video link after the rowdy scenes in the city's Assembly, hoped to restore confidence in her administration and address discontent after four months of often violent anti-government protests.

She had to halt her initial attempts to deliver the address after pro-democracy lawmakers called out for "five demands, not one less". The protesters' demands include universal suffrage and an independent inquiry into what they say has been excessive force by police.