

China furious, Hong Kong celebrates after U.S. move on bills

By YANAN WANG
Associated Press

BEIJING — China reacted furiously Thursday to President Donald Trump's signing two bills aimed at supporting human rights in Hong Kong, summoning the U.S. ambassador to protest and warning the move would undermine cooperation with Washington.

Hong Kong, a former British colony that was granted semi-autonomy when China took control in 1997, has been rocked by six months of sometimes violent pro-democracy demonstrations.

Thousands of pro-democracy activists crowded a public square in downtown Hong Kong on Thursday night for a "Thanksgiving Day" rally to thank the United States for passing the laws and vowed to "march on" in their fight.

Trump's approval of the bills was not unexpected. Neither was the reaction from Beijing, given China's adamant rejections of any



Protester holds U.S. flags during a demonstration in Hong Kong on Thursday.

AP Photo/Vincent Thian

commentary on what it considers an internal issue.

Nevertheless, the clash comes at a sensitive time and could upset already thorny trade negotiations between the two nations.

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng told U.S. Ambassador Terry

Branstad that the move constituted "serious interference in China's internal affairs and a serious violation of international law," a foreign ministry statement said.

Le called it a "nakedly hegemonic act." He urged the U.S. not to implement the bills to prevent greater dam-

age to U.S.-China relations, the ministry said.

In a statement about the meeting, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing said, "the Chinese Communist Party must honor its promises to the Hong Kong people."

The U.S. "believes that Hong Kong's autonomy, its

adherence to the rule of law, and its commitment to protecting civil liberties are key to preserving its special status under U.S. law," it said.

The U.S. laws, which passed both chambers of Congress almost unanimously, mandate sanctions on Chinese and Hong Kong officials who carry out human rights abuses in Hong Kong, require an annual review of Hong Kong's favorable trade status and prohibit the export of Hong Kong police of certain nonlethal munitions.

"I signed these bills out of respect for President Xi, China, and the people of Hong Kong," Trump said in a statement. "They are being enacted in the hope that Leaders and Representatives of China and Hong Kong will be able to amicably settle their differences leading to long term peace and prosperity for all."

Prominent Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong, who was among those who lobbied for the U.S. laws, said it

was remarkable that human rights had triumphed over the U.S.-China trade talks. Wong told Thursday's rally that the next aim is to expand global support by getting Britain and other Western nations to follow suit.

Since the Hong Kong protests began in June, Beijing has responded to expressions of support for the demonstrators from the U.S. and other countries by accusing them of orchestrating the unrest to contain China's development. The central government has blamed foreign "black hands" bent on destroying the city.

C.Y. Leung, a former chief executive of Hong Kong, said at a talk at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Hong Kong that he doubts the U.S. or supporters of the bills "ever had the interest of Hong Kong in mind."

He suggested Hong Kong was being used as a "proxy" for China and the legislation was a way to hit back at Beijing.

Ads assail conservative legal group over Trump's court picks

By MATTHEW DALY
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A liberal activist group is launching a digital ad campaign targeting the Federalist Society, a conservative legal organization that has championed judges appointed by President Donald Trump, such as Supreme Court Justices Brett Kavanaugh and Neil Gorsuch.

The ads, to appear on LinkedIn and Facebook, assail major law firms that sponsored the dinner, where Kavanaugh served as a partner, as well as Sullivan & Cromwell, WilmerHale and Consovoy McCarthy, where a senior partner was recently confirmed as a federal appellate judge.

The bare-knuckle ads are a rarity in the city's genteel legal world and an example of the increasing toxicity of the political debate over Trump's judicial nominees.

Demand Justice says the ads are the beginning of a sustained campaign "to hold

when they were teenagers, a charge he denied. "The Federalist Society is rebuilding Kavanaugh's image" through events such as its annual dinner, the ad charges, so why are the law firms paying for it?

Sponsored by Demand Justice, the ads target a half-dozen prominent firms that sponsored the dinner, such as Kirkland & Ellis, where Kavanaugh served as a partner, as well as Sullivan & Cromwell, WilmerHale and Consovoy McCarthy, where a senior partner was recently confirmed as a federal appellate judge.

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AP Photo/Sait Serkan Gurbuz, File

In this Nov. 16, 2017, file photo, Supreme Court Associate Justice Neil Gorsuch speaks at the Federalist Society's 2017 National Lawyers Convention in Washington.

accountable" people who help the Federalist Society "rehabilitate a sexual predator and attack the rule of law."

The Federalist Society declined to comment. Carrie Severino, a longtime Federalist Society member and policy director of the conserva-

tive Judicial Crisis Network, called criticism by Demand Justice and other liberal groups a badge of honor.

The Federalist group "is a successful network of conservatives and conservative lawyers that are very effective," Severino said. Liberal

critics "don't like that," she added.

The ads come as Trump and his allies celebrate his administration's success in getting more than 160 federal judicial nominees confirmed by the Republican-controlled Senate, including 48 appeals court judges. About a quarter of current federal appeals court judges were nominated by Trump.

Senate Majority Mitch McConnell of Kentucky hailed Trump's record on reshaping courts in an appearance with the Republican president this month. "And Mr. President, we're going to keep on doing it," he said. "My motto is: Leave no vacancy behind."

The Senate will begin considering eight more judicial nominees next week, including Sarah Pitlyk, a former Kavanaugh clerk who was deemed unqualified by

the American Bar Association. Pitlyk, who has never tried a case, works for an anti-abortion-rights group. Many Democrats opposed her nomination.

Brian Fallon, executive director of Demand Justice, is a former adviser to Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign and former spokesman for Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer.

He said Pitlyk's nomination and the recent party line confirmation of Steven Menashi, a former White House lawyer named by Trump to a New York-based appeals court, show the importance of the ad campaign.

Many of Trump's nominees, Menashi among them, have ties to the Federalist Society, which has vetted and recommended dozens of conservative lawyers for Trump's consideration as judges.

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