

DAFOH interviews CA State Senator Anderson about the fate of organ harvesting resolution

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On July 20, 2017, CA State Senator Joel Anderson (Rep., 38th district), along with four of his colleagues, initiated State Joint Resolution 10 (SJR 10), expressing concern over allegations of China's forced organ harvesting practices. However, in the early stage of the proposal, Chairwoman Senator Hanna Beth Jackson directed the committee staff to remove the resolution's reference to organ harvesting, leaving only a general condemnation of "any government-sanctioned persecution of Falun Gong practitioners" in China.

Shortly afterwards, in September 2017, the Chinese Consulate in San Francisco sent an official though an anonymous and [unsigned letter](#) to every member of the CA State senate, warning them not to adopt SJR 10 and threatening that passing the resolution would "deeply damage" California-China relations. The day the letter was received, President Pro Tempore Kevin de León (Dem., 24th district) made a motion to refer SJR 10 back to the rules committee. Subsequently, Senator Anderson proposed 18 different motions to have the resolution heard before the legislature adjourned for the year at the end of September but was unsuccessful in bringing the resolution to a vote.

Several other states have already passed resolutions condemning China's forced organ harvesting practices including Illinois, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and most recently, Arizona. In 2016, the United States House of Representatives passed Resolution 343 calling for an end to China's forced organ harvesting program.

Senator Anderson's recent response to DAOFH's interview questions about his experience with SJR 10 exposes China's threatening influence over American government officials. He tell us that despite "their success in silencing dissenting voices in one of the most powerful legislatures in the nation", we should all have the courage to speak out against this appalling abuse of human rights.

DAFOH interview questions:

1. What inspired you to introduce Senate Resolution SJR-10 condemning the persecution and forced organ harvesting of Falun Gong practitioners in China?

My connection to the Falun Dafa community dates back to 2008 when I was an Assemblyman. A California resident, Joanna Wang, reached out to me in desperation when her mom, Jinhua Ma, was arrested in China for practicing Falun Dafa. I wrote a letter to the Chinese government to ask for Jinhua's release. It took eight years for the Chinese government to release her mother.

Over the years I have worked with the local Falun Dafa Association in San Diego, and the Epoch times, to write letters in support of congressional efforts to condemn the persecution of Falun Dafa practitioners, support the Shen Yun performances in California, and sponsor educational events about forced organ harvesting in China.

I was approached by Dr. Dana Churchill, the west coast delegate for Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting, to author a resolution in the California legislature. With the success of House Res. 343 in 2016, we felt the time was right and we should be successful.

And personally, this is a righteous issue. Forced organ harvesting is a modern day holocaust and history will judge us on whether we spoke up for human rights regardless of the political consequences.

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2. Please describe how the initial version of your resolution was changed and what effect this had on its meaning and impact.

The introduced version of the resolution included specific language about the documented forced organ harvesting in China, and the original version can be read in full [here](#).

In the Senate Judiciary Committee, the bill was re-written by the committee staff under the direction of the Chairwoman, Senator Hanna Beth Jackson. Any mention of organ harvesting was removed, and instead the resolution now formally condemns “any government-sanctioned persecution of Falun Gong practitioners” in China. We managed to negotiate back in the clause that recognizes the passage of House Res. 343, which does specifically condemn state-sanctioned forced organ harvesting.

While the bill sponsors and I were disappointed at the watering down of the language, we were hopeful that accepting the amendments would get the bi-partisan support we needed to move the resolution. SJR 10 did pass out of the Judiciary committee with the support of the chair and members of her party. We assumed that the new language would be acceptable to rest of the Senate body.

3. Senate Resolution SJR-10 was tabled just before Labor Day, shortly before the California legislative session ended on September 15, 2017. Can you please give us your understanding of why this occurred? What happened to the bill in the judiciary committee? Please describe for us what actions you subsequently took to get SJR-10 voted upon.

It was reported to my office that the Senate Pro Tem received a call from the Chinese Consulate in San Francisco informing him that an opposition letter from them was on its way. That day on the floor, the Pro Tem made a motion, which I opposed, to refer SJR 10 back to the rules committee. This was a fairly unprecedented maneuver especially in the case of a symbolic human rights resolution with bi-partisan support. Later that day, every legislator got a copy of the three page unsigned letter from the consulate in their email inbox.

I can't answer why the Chinese consulate's letter had the effect it did – I repeatedly queried my colleagues over the course of many floor speeches I gave in the weeks leading up to the end of session, what power does an unsigned three page letter from the Chinese consulate have over our body?

During the last two weeks of the 2017 session, I made eighteen separate motions on the floor to attempt to have a vote on SJR 10. Sixteen of those were what we call “hostile amendments,” a set of amendments offered to another member's resolution without their approval. The hostile amendments I offered were to strike out the original language of the author's resolution and insert the language of SJR 10. The benefit of offering hostile amendments is that the Senator offering the amendments is allowed to speak on their motion. Each time I did this, the majority party voted to “table” my amendments, meaning the amendments themselves did not receive an up or down vote. If you visit my [You Tube channel](#) you can see all of these floor speeches.

I really want to thank the Northern California Falun Dafa community for their tireless advocacy during those last weeks of session. They were at the Capitol every day, sat through hours of floor session in the public gallery and watched their legislature vote against them over and over. Their quiet and persistent presence sent a strong message to the Senators that the persecuted were looking to them to speak up for human rights and would long remember whether they did so.

I also made two motions to remove SJR 10 from the Rules committee and bring it back to the Senator Floor for a vote. This is not a “debatable motion” so I wasn't allowed to speak about SJR 10 or the persecution of Falun Gong. Both of those motions were also “tabled” by the majority party.

4. The California legislature has a long history of passing resolutions that take moral positions on both national and international issues, including human rights abuses. Why is this resolution different than other symbolic resolutions on human rights issues previously passed by the California legislature?

I repeatedly asked this very question of my colleagues while I spoke on the floor. And Steven Greenhut made this same point [in a column on this issue](#). Condemning genocides and standing up for human rights has never

been a partisan issue in the past. I believe this episode is demonstrative of the inherent problem of single party rule in a democracy. The voice of the minority is silenced and I have fewer rights than the members of the super majority to have my resolutions heard. I never said anyone has to support it, every legislator is free to vote their conscience, but shouldn't all our constituents have the opportunity to know where we stand? Don't my constituents have a right for the person they elected to be their voice, to have an opportunity to bring my resolution up for a vote?

5. In 2016, the United States Congress unanimously passed H. Res. 343 condemning the persecution and forced organ harvesting of Falun Gong practitioners in China. Why do you think California's Congressional members unanimously supported this Federal resolution, but the State legislature did not support SJR-10?

It's very hard to understand why people of the same political party, representing the same communities, would take such a different path on the same issue. Only they can answer that.

6. The Chinese consulate sent a letter to California's state legislators opposing Senate Resolution 10. Please tell us about your first hand experience of how the Chinese government may have influenced politicians in California.

In my own case, after writing a letter to the Chinese President about the release of Jinhua Ma, I was sent a threatening letter that I was labeled a terrorist and if I ever traveled to China I would be arrested. I know my colleague and SJR 10 co-author Assemblyman Voepel, who at the time was Mayor of a city in my district, received threatening letters after he wrote in support of Falun Gong. As a Vietnam War veteran, he is no shrinking daisy and stood up to their tactics but said it "chilled him to the bone." While we were not deterred by these threats from the Chinese Communist Party, others who serve in the legislature apparently have been.

7. What steps do you think need to be taken to increase the likelihood that resolutions like the one you proposed will be passed in the future?

The most important thing is that the public is informed and holds their legislators accountable. The greatest success we've had in running SJR 10 is the increased public awareness about what is going on in China and at home to suppress the reality of human rights abuses in that country. Thanks to the work of DAFOH, the Coalition to End Organ Pillaging, the Epoch Times and NTD media, there is a lot of education going on and that is the most important thing that needs to continue.

8. How can DAFOH be of help to you, other legislators or the people of California?

By increase your presence in the Capitol and continuing to educate legislators and their staff about the issues. One of the most common things we hear from people is, "why haven't I seen anything about this in the news?" Advocacy groups should be publishing op-eds, writing letters to the editor, and speaking with the media in California so citizens can be informed.

9. Do you believe other state legislators who move to pass similar resolutions could face the same obstacles experienced in California?

Unfortunately I do think this is likely to be a problem for anyone who tries it in the future. The question will be whether they will find the courage, like Minnesota, Illinois and Pennsylvania have, to persist despite the obstacles.

10. Recent media reports discuss the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) influence over many aspects of American society, including politics. Do you feel it is a risk to our model of governance to give China an ear and a voice in our political system?

Watching a foreign power interfere with our legislative process has been alarming to say the least. And hearing the Chinese Communist Party propaganda defaming Falun Gong practitioners being parroted in the state Capitol is disturbing. Their success in silencing dissenting voices in one of the most powerful legislatures in the nation will only embolden their soft power tactics.

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