

Bush urged to ask Chinese premier to release jailed activist

LOLITA C. BALDOR, Associated Press Writer Friday, December 5, 2003
(12-05) 16:13 PST WASHINGTON (AP)

As Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao prepares to visit the United States next week, lawmakers are asking President Bush to press for the release of a democracy advocate imprisoned in China for almost 18 months.

Eight senators, including three members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, asked Bush in a letter Friday to discuss the case of Boston scholar Yang Jianli with the premier next week.

Yang, a Chinese citizen with permanent residency in the United States, was tried in August on charges of spying for Taiwan. The verdict has not been announced, but Yang still is held. He had been detained in April 2002 for using false travel papers while visiting China to meet with pro-democracy activists.

The senators, in their letter, said "despite China's commitment to issue a verdict within one month, over four months later he remains in Chinese custody, and no verdict appears to be forthcoming."

Also, 32 members of the U.S. House sent a letter Friday to Wen, saying that releasing Yang would be a humanitarian gesture that would "greatly enhance your country's standing internationally."

It's not known whether Bush will bring up Yang's case. The State Department had no immediate response to the letter.

Yang is on a list of 13 prisoners that the U.S. government has identified to China as priority cases.

Jared Genser, a lawyer with the group Freedom Now, who is working with Yang's wife Christina Fu, said the letters will help keep attention on the case.

Among those signing the letters were Sens. Edward M. Kennedy and John Kerry, both D-Mass., as well as House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and House International Relations Committee Chairman Henry Hyde, R-Ill.

Congress already passed a resolution this year demanding Yang's immediate and unconditional release. A U.N. committee also said in June that Yang's detention violates international law because Chinese authorities failed to give him a fair trial or access to a lawyer.