



## Why China may be the last bipartisan issue left in Washington

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The issue brings together every wing of American politics, from progressive populists to "America First" nationalists to traditional security hawks.

Sen. Todd Young, R-Ind., has a quick answer when asked whether President Joe Biden's hopes of reviving bipartisanship in the nation's capital can recover from a rough start: China.

"If he decides to step up — he and his administration — and is really hard on China moving forward, I look forward to working with him on making sure that we out-innovate, out-compete and out-grow the Chinese and also starve them of the capital that they need to continue to build their slaveholder state and their blue-water navy," Young said.

Young is not alone in his assessment. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., has been stoking support for action aimed at China, hoping to get bipartisan legislation on the floor in the spring.

Schumer said the package must address three elements: U.S. competitiveness in manufacturing and innovation, the U.S. partnerships with NATO and India and the need to "expose, curb and end, once and for all, China's predatory practices."

"On the China bill, we have good bipartisan support," Schumer told reporters Tuesday, saying he had instructed committee chairs to "work with your Republican colleagues" to get over the finish line.

His counterpart also sees an opening.

"If any issue is ripe for a regular-order bipartisan process, it is this one," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said Wednesday, adding that military spending is a "crucial first step" and that semiconductors and science research are openings for compromise.

Schumer and Young are co-sponsors of the Endless Frontier Act, which would commit over \$100 billion to promote emerging technologies that China's government is working to promote, as well, including artificial intelligence, quantum computing and robotics.

The version introduced in the previous Congress drew an eclectic mix of sponsors, including conservatives like Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont.; moderates like Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine;

Blue Dog Democrats like Rep. Abigail Spanberger, D-Va.; and coastal liberals like Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore.

"It's a positive answer to a lot of the anxieties about the rise of China," said another co-sponsor, Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., an influential policy voice among progressives who represents Silicon Valley and has warned about China's "authoritarian capitalism" in speeches.

Politics could still scuttle the agreement.

There are also concerns over how to approach the issue with sensitivity because of fears that anti-China sentiment could contribute to racist attacks against Asian Americans.

Democrats and Asian American groups widely criticized former President Donald Trump's mocking use of phrases like "kung flu" during the pandemic because, they warned, it stoked hatred at home.

"Officials should be extremely precise when describing the government of China as opposed to the Chinese, because I think that given what's happening in U.S. society to Chinese Americans and other Asian Americans we owe everyone that kind of precision," Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, said in a hearing Thursday.

Washington is being pushed to find consensus on China, observers in both parties say.

Beijing's crackdown on Hong Kong's democracy movement, its abuse of minority Uyghurs, its widening surveillance state and its confrontations with American companies over speech have shocked both parties. Military hawks are worried about China's stance toward allies like Taiwan and whether its expanding tech companies could undermine national security.

The rise of Trump in the GOP and of Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., in the Democratic Party have elevated voices more willing to subsidize industry at home to counter China's domestic investment. Some on the left see an opportunity to build support for key climate priorities, like advancing clean energy and electric vehicles, as part of an effort to outpace similar efforts in China.

China's handling of the early coronavirus outbreak within its borders worsened tension, while the disruption to worldwide supply chains raised concerns about whether the U.S. had become too dependent on manufacturers abroad for things like medical supplies, from China or elsewhere.

"There's an understanding that what allowed us to win the Cold War with the Soviet Union was our Sputnik moment, where we had 2 percent of GDP going to science and technology," Khanna said. "We're not going to win the 21st century if we fall behind China on critical technologies."

Washington's concerns are reflected among the public, as well. A Gallup survey in March indicated that only 20 percent of Americans had a favorable impression of China, by far the lowest number recorded since Gallup began tracking the question over 40 years ago.

The turn toward a Cold War-style economic standoff has detractors.

Scott Lincicome, a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, said there were legitimate fears about China's rise but that there was less evidence that its state interventions in the economy, like a high-profile "Made in China 2025" initiative, were succeeding.

"You have China hawk Republicans and pro-economic interventionist Democrats joining hands deciding to throw money at stuff," Lincicome said. "Then you throw in very smart lobbyists who see an opportunity for money."

There are also skeptics among progressives. Dean Baker, a co-founder of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, has argued that aggressive measures to bring back manufacturing jobs from overseas might not solve the problem.

"I do worry that we will see a lot of nonsense about the need to strengthen our supply chains as an excuse for lots of trade policies that don't make a lot of sense," Baker said.

The politics, abetted by agreement on China's bad behavior, tilt toward bipartisan action.

"The prospects of getting a deal done are very high," said Zack Cooper, a research fellow and expert on U.S.-China relations at the conservative American Enterprise Institute. "China policy is the one last bastion of bipartisan policy on the national security side."

Cooper said that Republicans agree with Schumer's three goals but that there may be some differences, such as that some GOP lawmakers want to spend more on defense or that some Democrats want to give the state a larger role in the domestic market.

Election-year politics have impeded cooperation in the past. Democrats declined to join a House GOP committee on China last year, out of fear, reports said, that it would be a vehicle to excuse the administration's coronavirus response.

Trump often played up his confrontation with China's leadership over trade and withdrew from the World Health Organization over objections to China's influence, a decision Biden reversed. Democrats, including Schumer, attacked Trump for not pushing China harder on certain trade issues and for downplaying human rights concerns.

But Democrats and Republicans approved new support for semiconductor manufacturers in a defense bill that passed last year, an issue Sens. John Cornyn, R-Texas, and Mark Warner, D-Va., have made a focus.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., has sponsored a variety of China-related bills, some with Democrats, including one with Merkley aimed at blocking goods made by forced Uyghur labor, one to provide incentives for mining for rare earth minerals and one to block certain Chinese companies from accessing U.S. capital.

"Addressing China's threat to our nation is certainly an area where we should be able to come to an agreement," Rubio said in a statement. Referring to the Chinese Communist Party, he said, "A truly bipartisan bill would push back against the CCP's misdeeds, protect against its exploitation of American openness, and invest in the capacity we need to compete."