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Congress Asks Biden Admin to Sanction Chinese Seafood Companies Linked to Forced Labor



Employees peel shrimps along a production line at a seafood factory in Rizhao, Shandong province, China, March 2, 2011. (Stringer/Reuters)

By **JIMMY QUINN**
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Ahead of a key World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting, a dozen members of Congress are asking the Biden administration to impose full blocking sanctions on Chinese seafood companies that have been linked to forced-labor abuses, NATIONAL REVIEW has exclusively learned.

The bipartisan effort comes on the heels of recent reporting by the nonprofit journalism advocacy outfit Outlaw Ocean Project. That organization brought to light the role of Uyghur and North Korean forced laborers at coastal seafood processing plants in China by trailing Chinese fishing vessels on the ocean and then tracking trucks to facilities linked to the abuses.

After the organization filed last month a petition with the Treasury Department, asking that the U.S. impose sanctions on seven such firms, a bipartisan group of lawmakers is taking up the fight.

Specifically, they’re asking Secretary of State Antony Blinken, U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai, and Acting Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Troy Miller to take a series of steps to crack down on forced labor-linked seafood exports before an upcoming WTO meeting, where countries will talk about anticompetitive fishing practices.

“While the pattern of forced labor by the Chinese government, in Xinjiang and beyond, is known, there is evidence of these companies working with China’s national and provincial governments to recruit and utilize forced labor,” wrote the lawmakers, who were led by Representatives Michelle Steel and Jimmy Panetta, last week in a letter obtained by NATIONAL REVIEW.

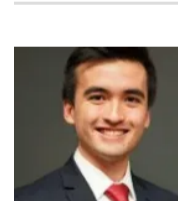
“We are concerned that such abuses may taint U.S. seafood supply chains, as we are aware of serious allegations that seafood produced with forced labor supplies food service companies, grocers, and restaurants around the world, including in the United States.”

Applying the Global Magnitsky Act to the seven seafood companies identified by Congress and the Outlaw Ocean Project would allow the U.S. government to seize their assets and prohibit all transactions with Americans.

In addition to the blocking sanctions, the lawmakers asked CBP to enforce existing laws, including the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, to weed out seafood processed using forced labor.

“Effective deployment of these tools sends a strong message to our trading partners that the United States takes unfair fisheries practices seriously,” they wrote. The letter’s other signatories included Representatives Earl Blumenauer, Darin LaHood, Mike Thompson, Greg Steube, Linda Sanchez, Terri Sewell, Suzan DelBene, Dan Kildee, Brad Schneider, and Jimmy Gomez.

“Given the evidence before us, we have a duty to investigate allegations of forced labor both on the high seas and in seafood processing, especially when it is part of a CCP-sponsored effort to subjugate the minority Uyghur population,” the lawmakers said in a statement.



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