

# US lawmakers push Customs to better enforce anti-Uyghur forced labor law

The letter is just the latest response on Capitol Hill to the *Outlaw Ocean Project* report published in the *New Yorker* on Oct. 9

By [Jason Huffman](#) | Oct. 20, 2023 11:01 BST



□ The US Capitol building in Washington, D.C. Credit: Vlad G/ Shutterstock.com

US representatives Raul Grijalva and Jared Huffman are pushing Customs and Border Protection (CBP) -- the federal agency that has the power to stop imports -- to better enforce a new law and prevent Chinese seafood coming into the US from processing plants caught using forced Uyghur labor.

In just the latest move responding to the *Outlaw Ocean Project* two-part series, published in the *New Yorker* on Oct. 9, Grijalva of Arizona and Huffman of California, both members of the House Natural Resources Committee, sent a two-page letter to CBP commissioner Troy Miller on Friday (Oct. 20). They urge him "to use the full authority granted under the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA) [of 2021] and sect. 307 of the Tariff Act of 1930."

Under the UFLPA, which was passed in Dec. 2021 and went into effect in June 2022, it is illegal to import any goods, wares, articles, or merchandise mined, produced, or manufactured in the Xinjiang Uygher autonomous region of China, and under the Tariff Act, it is illegal to import into the US any goods derived, wholly or in part, from forced labor, remind the two lawmakers.

The second of two articles written by *Outlaw Ocean* founder Ian Urbina, a former Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, claims to provide evidence of a Chinese program that has enlisted and transported a large number of Uyghurs from Xinjiang, in the land-locked, northwestern part of China, over 1,000 miles to seafood processing plants in Shangdong, on the eastern coast.

The articles have generated so much attention that a joint panel of Congress and White House officials has called a special hearing to learn more about the report, as reported earlier by [Undercurrent News](#).

"According to one article, since 2018, the Chinese government forcefully transferred at least 1,000 Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities from Xinjiang to work in 10 large seafood companies in Shangdong. Five of the companies have exported over 47,000 metric tons of seafood to the United States since then, including 17% of all squid imported into the United States," the Grijalva and Huffman letter states.

They say they are also "deeply concerned with evidence suggesting North Korean labor use in seafood plants in Northeastern China." Three Chinese plants using North Korean workers have reportedly supplied seafood to more than a dozen US seafood importers in the US.

Chinese officials have rejected the claims, claiming they are "completely fabricated," as reported by [Undercurrent](#).

The two Democrats previously headed the House Natural Resources Committee and its oceans subcommittee, respectively, but now are ranking members of the same panels as a result of Republicans seizing the majority in the House.

They've asked Miller to, by no later than Nov. 15, provide Congress with a document describing the actions taken by CBP and its Forced Labor Enforcement Task Force to prevent the import of seafood linked to forced labor. They also want the agency to present a document describing any efforts to "develop and refine a strategy for targeting sectors, like seafood, that are likely to violate UFLPA or [the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act]."

Additionally, on Friday, Grijalva and Huffman wrote a four-page letter to Gina Raimondo and Richard Spinrad, the commerce secretary and the under-secretary for oceans and atmosphere, respectively, asking them to address a long list of questions focused on the requested expansion of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP).

"Expanding [SIMP] to all imported seafood -- and ensuring the program is functional, well-implemented enforced -- is key to closing US markets to seafood derived from [illegal, unreported and unregulated] fishing and abusive labor practices," they wrote.

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