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US Congressional Roundtable Focus on Ethnic Profiling Against Chinese American Scientists

BY Boyi Nan, JULY 3, 2021, The Paper

On July 1, US congress Representatives Jamie Raskin and Judy Chu, held a roundtable entitled “Researching while Chinese American: Ethnic Profiling, Chinese American Scientists and a New American Brain Drain,” hearing about effects against Chinese American scientists. Steven Chu, Nobel Prize in Physics winner and former Secretary of Energy, attended the roundtable.

The roundtable marks the first time US congress seriously concerns of racial profiling against Chinese American scientists in the past several years. Racial profiling, is also translated as racial suspicion, racial classification, and racial categorization, which refers to the fact that law enforcement agencies consider race or ethnic characteristics when determining the identity of a criminal suspect for a particular type of crime or illegal act. This led to more suspicion of a certain ethnic group in the process of solving the case.

The roundtable was hosted by Representative Jamie Raskin, Chair of the Oversight Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, and Representative Judy Chu, Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC).

According to the congress representatives website, the roundtable discussed the negative impact of the "China Initiative" which was initiated by the Trump administration on the scientific community.

The U.S. Department of Justice officially launched the "China Initiative" in November 2018, with the purpose of responding to China's "threats to U.S. national security." At first, the initiative was mainly aimed at Chinese companies and economic issues, but soon, Chinese American professors and researchers who worked in American universities and research institutions became key targets.

As of May this year, according to the "China Initiative" information published on the official website of the US Department of Justice, among the nearly 100 cases, there have been 14 cases related to Chinese American professors and researchers, none of which involved theft of intellectual property rights or business intelligence. The allegations are all missing reporting, misrepresentation, and missing tax reporting, etc.

In the face of the intensifying "storm" of accusations, in February this year, American scientists and civil rights organizations jointly wrote to Representative Raskin, in the hope of hearings on the "China Initiative". They also wrote to U.S. President Biden earlier, requesting the termination of the initiative, but received no response.

Representative Raskin denounced ethnic profiling during the roundtable, rejecting any notions of collective guilt or ethnic guilt. He pointed out that innovation and technology is established on the ground of free-flowing thoughts and theories. And it is harming an entire scientific community by targeting people who are ethnically Chinese, without evidence.

Representative Chu stated that the US needs to make sure not to repeat the mistakes of the Cold War which means not to spread unfounded suspicions that paint all Chinese people as threats and which put innocent Chinese Americans at risk.

Former US Secretary of Energy and current Stanford professor Steven Chu also characterized the impact of racial profiling on Chinese American scientists, "Many of my Chinese-American faculty colleagues feel that they are under increased and unjustified scrutiny by the U.S. government. The Department of Justice's 'China Initiative' and statements by U.S. funding agencies is creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation." Professor Steven Chu criticized such an initiative as not part of a normal American society and reminds him of McCarthyism, "The United States has benefited so much from brain gain for a half century. Are we willing to throw it all away?"

A white paper produced by Committee of 100, a New York based US Chinese American non-profit organization, was highlighted as part of the congressional roundtable. According to Committee of 100 President Zheng Yu Huang, the roundtable is just a first step, with congressional hearings, formal reports are expected for future results. To make all those happen, it will need to lobby more congress representatives from both Democratic and Republican parties. Committee of 100 plans to release an updated version of the research this fall. (END)