

June 21, 1997

Mr. Ted Berkman
409 Orilla Del Mar
Santa Barbara, CA.

Dear Mr. Berkman:

I came home from Washington, D.C. late last night, and, still on east coast time, got up early this Saturday morning, fixed a cup of coffee, read the morning paper, and discovered your fine letter on MFN status respecting China.

It is a matter of particular significance to me since I will be voting on the measure sometime this next week (I suspect on Tuesday) and have been carrying on a lively conversation on the topic with my colleagues in Washington together with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Trade Ambassador Barshefky, Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, and others.

I will give a House speech on the subject this week, which I am in process of preparing.

You are certainly accurate in your description of the collective temperament of China. Certainly there are vast outrages to moral and spiritual sensibility. My wife and I were there recently too, and we noted all of this together with a virtual absence of freedom of the press. But there are encouraging signs too. For example, the current generation of university students displayed clear signs of wanting to participate in the modern world. The possibility that Hong Kong will have great impact on China than China has on Hong Kong is another strong plus.

But the most critical question has to do with how human rights can be advanced. One group says, since human rights are in short supply, we shouldn't be trading with China. The other group says that trade with

China will advance human rights, through engagement but not endorsement. Among the people with whom I am discussing this subject, I know of no one who says we must pursue trade opportunities regardless of our concern for human rights. Of course, there may be people who are saying this, but I know that this is not the position of the White House or that of the Secretary of State, nor is it the position of the persons in Congress who will vote in favor of sustaining MFN status for China. The problem is that we just don't know how to advance human rights in a country with a 5000 year culture, which has really never experienced democracy, and which may be emerging from its brief (but tragic) love-affair with communism.

As indicated, I'm going to give a talk in Congress this coming week. Working with Senator Moynihan, I will be striving to eliminate MFN terminology, and replacing it with "regular trading partner." You can be sure that I will have your letter in mind as I write my own speech. You can be sure too that all of the persons on our staff, both here in the district and in Washington, will read and study your good letter.

I've long believed that democracy is born and sustained in conversation. I'm very grateful for your letter to the editor. I'll send you the text of mine from Washington.

I apologize for the stationery. I'm working off my home computer before going to the office, and don't have the official stationery at my disposal.

Yours sincerely,

Walter H. Capps
Member of Congress