

US representative hopes to meet Chen Shui-bian

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US Congressional Subcommittee on Asia chairman Steve Chabot is hoping to meet with former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) late next week.

It will be the strongest show of US political support for Chen to date.

Chabot, a major backer of Taiwan in the US Congress, is scheduled to leave for Asia this weekend, visiting South Korea, Japan and Taiwan.

He is trying to make arrangements to meet Chen next Friday.

"I believe that former president Chen Shui-bian has been incarcerated long enough," said Chabot, a founding member of the Taiwan caucus.

"The humanitarian thing to do would be to let Chen go home," he said. "However many years he has left, he should be able to spend that time with his family."

Answering questions about Chen following a meeting of the Asia subcommittee on Thursday, Chabot said: "Keeping him in prison for a day longer is unnecessary, wrongheaded and inhumane."

"He should be returned home at this point," he said.

Chabot said the administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) had sent him copies of the charges against Chen and the court judgement in his case.

"I read them. I read the reports and they didn't change my mind at all," Chabot said.

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“Chen has been incarcerated far too long,” he said. “As far as I am concerned, I think it amounts to the criminalization of politics.”

“I am not justifying or condoning what President Chen was accused of, but whatever he did he has been in jail far too long, especially when you consider his physical and mental condition at this time,” Chabot said. “The humanitarian thing to do is to allow him to go home and be with his family.”

“I would hope that Taiwan, being a humanitarian country, a good ally, a strong ally of the United States and generally doing the right thing, does the right thing in this case too,” he said.

The Congressman refused to say what action he would take if the Ma administration continues to refuse to grant Chen medical parole.

However, Chabot is deeply and emotionally committed to helping Chen and two political sources close to him said that he would not let the case drop and was prepared to take further action.

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