Lawmakers express “deep concern” over Blizzard’s Hong Kong protest response

Enlarge / Mei from *Overwatch* has become a grass roots symbol of the Hong Kong protests in the wake of Blizzard’s decision.

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A bipartisan group of Senate and House lawmakers has signed a letter expressing “deep concern” over Activision Blizzard’s recent decision to punish Ng “Blitzchung” Wai Chung after the pro *Hearthstone* player expressed support for continuing Hong Kong protests last week. “This decision is particularly concerning in light of the Chinese government’s growing appetite for pressuring American businesses to help stifle free speech,” the letter reads, in part.

Blizzard originally banned the Hong Kong-based player for a year and withheld his prize money after he said “Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our age!” in Chinese during the livestreamed event. That penalty was later reduced to a six-month suspension and Chung’s prize money was reinstated.

But the letter, addressed to Activision Blizzard CEO Bobby Kotick, urges Blizzard “in the strongest terms to reconsider your decision with respect to Mr. Chung. You have the opportunity to reverse course. We urge you to take it.”

The letter is signed by an unlikely group of legislators who

often spar publicly on major legislative issues: Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.), and Rep. Tom Malinowski (D-N.J.).

Elsewhere in the letter, the legislators cite an employee walkout in protest of Blizzard's decision and calls for boycotts of the company among "gamers around the world" as additional reasons for Blizzard to reverse itself. The letter also makes reference to similar decisions by Apple and the NBA to shut down apps and public discussion of the Hong Kong protests under Chinese pressure (decisions that have drawn their own congressional letters in turn).

"Because your company is such a pillar of the gaming industry, your disappointing decision could have a chilling effect on gamers who seek to use their platform to promote human rights and basic freedoms," the letter says. "As China amplifies its campaign of intimidation, you and your company must decide whether to look beyond the bottom line and promote American values—like freedom of speech and thought—or to give in to Beijing's demands in order to preserve market access."

The letter comes after Blizzard cancelled a recent public event to promote the launch of *Overwatch* on the Switch and ahead of planned protests of the company at November's BlizzCon fan gathering. Blizzard was also forced to punish a college *Hearthstone* team this week for flashing a sign in support of the Hong Kong protestors during a livestreamed match.

The game industry at large is separately facing congressional pressure over selling in-game items via randomized loot boxes. A bipartisan group of senators introduced sweeping legislation to ban the practice, and the FTC continues to look into it following pressure from Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.)

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