

# Music sustained Tibetan prisoner



**SANDY SCHAEFFER**, *Gannett News Service*

**Ngawang Choephel (left) meets with Rep. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., on Capitol Hill on Thursday. Choephel, 34, was released from prison by the Chinese government last weekend after six years.**

## Choephel celebrates freedom

**By Erin Kelly**

*Free Press Washington Writer*

**WASHINGTON** —

The Tibetan music that landed Ngawang Choephel in a Chinese prison for more than six years is also what sustained him through his ordeal, the former Middlebury College scholar and his ex-classmates said Thursday.

Choephel sang songs in prison and was serenaded by his fellow Tibetan prisoners.

**“I would like to say thank you to the people in Vermont.”**

**Ngawang Choephel**, released from Chinese prison

“I am grateful to all the Tibetans who shared their folk music with me in Tibet during my two months’ travel and even after my imprisonment,” said Choephel, speaking briefly in the office of Rep. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt.

Choephel was re-

leased by the Chinese government Sunday — one month before President Bush is scheduled to visit the country. The U.S. State Department, the Vermont congressional delegation and Vermont residents have been campaigning for his release since he was

taken into custody in 1995, charged with espionage and sentenced to 18 years in prison.

His real crime, in the eyes of the Chinese, was that he was videotaping Tibetan musical performances to make a documentary to show the Dalai Lama, the exiled leader of Tibet. Tibet is under Chinese control, and China has sought to wipe out Tibetan culture.

“I think it’s a testament to his courage of

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