

Democrat to seek help for TFD

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A congressman has asked US President Barack Obama to become directly involved in the growing controversy over the future of the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD).

Robert Andrews, a Democrat from New Jersey, said in a letter to the White House that the TFD's existence and present general policy directions were very much in line with the "fundamental values of democracy and human rights which Taiwan shares with the US."

It goes on to ask Obama to "urge" President Ma Ying-jeou and his administration to "let the TFD do its useful work the way it had done over the past six years."

A number of other Congressmen are expected to publicly support Andrews' letter later this week.

The White House could not confirm last night that Obama had actually read the letter, but an official said: "It's an important and significant subject and I am sure he will give it every consideration."

In the letter to Obama, Andrews said that he was writing "to bring an issue to your attention that is of great concern."

He added: "Recently, news reports from Taiwan have come to our attention that the administration of Taiwan's President Ma Ying-jeou is planning to curtail the activities of the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, reversing the Foundation's policies of supporting democratic movements in other countries on grounds that this may offend the autocratic government of the People's Republic of China and replacing the TFD's personnel with people sympathetic to this accommodationalist philosophy."

The TFD was founded in 2003 and modeled on the US' National Endowment for Democracy with the aim of promoting democracy and human rights in Asia.

"The TFD liaised with Tibetan and Chinese dissident groups as well as organizations from the Czech Republic, former East Germany, Hungary and Poland, inviting speakers to Taiwan to discuss such issues as transitional justice and human rights," the letter said.

"In January of this year, it also invited Freedom House to Taiwan to present its annual report of freedom in the world. It also supports democracy activists in Cuba," it said.

Andrews added that he was concerned the Ma administration was seeking accommodation with China "at the expense of freedom and democracy, not only in Taiwan itself, but also in China and Tibet."

"This would constitute another blow to Taiwan's vibrant democracy," he said.

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