

Senators urge visit by Trump official

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The new American Institute in Taiwan compound is pictured in Taipei's Neihu District on June 12 last year.

Photo: Chang Chia-ming, Taipei Times

Sixteen US senators on Monday wrote a joint letter urging US President Donald Trump to send a Cabinet official to Taipei next month to attend a major event to be held by the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT).

The AIT on April 15 is to hold an evening reception at its new facility in Neihu District (新湖) to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Taiwan Relations Act, which the US senators said has served as the cornerstone of US policy toward Taiwan, and helped maintain peace, security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region against an "increasingly aggressive" People's Republic of China.

"The event provides an ideal opportunity, consistent with the requirements set forth in the Taiwan Travel Act (Public Law 115-135) that you signed into law on March 16, 2018, to send a Cabinet-level official to Taipei to underscore our nation's enduring commitment to Taiwan's democracy and its people," the letter said.

The provisions of the law were further reaffirmed in the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act, which was signed into law on Dec. 31 last year, they said.

"We believe that travel of this nature is important to ensure we are acting in accordance with our commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act, especially given Chinese efforts to change the cross-strait status quo," the letter said.

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The senators said they believed that the presence of a Cabinet-level US official at the AIT event would “send a strong signal of American’s unwavering commitment to and support for one of our strongest partners in the region.”

The letter was drawn up by US senators Marco Rubio, a Republican, and Bob Menendez, a Democrat. It was cosigned by nine Republican senators — Cory Gardner, Jim Inhofe, John Cornyn, Johnny Isakson, Tom Cotton, Marsha Blackburn, Rick Scott, Josh Hawley and Mike Rounds — and five Democrats — Chris Coons, Tammy Duckworth, Ron Wyden, Ben Cardin and Edward Markey.

The last visit to Taiwan by a US Cabinet official was in 2014, when then-US president Barack Obama’s administration sent then-Environmental Protection Agency administrator Gina McCarthy.

AIT spokeswoman Amanda Mansour yesterday told the Taipei Times that the AIT would invite prominent people from the US and Taiwan to the celebration, including members of the US Congress.

However, she did not address the possibility of a visit by a Cabinet-level official.

“For decades, US-Taiwan cooperation has enjoyed strong, bipartisan support, including for exchanges of high-level visits, as outlined in the Taiwan Relations Act,” Mansour said, adding that the reception would be part of the AIT’s year-long campaign to recognize the robust US-Taiwan partnership that has developed over the past 40 years.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs thanked the senators for the bipartisan support they have shown Taiwan.

“Our government will continue to stay in close contact with the US to seek visits by high-level US officials, so that they can join us in witnessing the robust development of Taiwan-US relations,” the ministry said.

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