

Tsai discusses beef and Obama with Burghardt

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US beef imports and US President Barack Obama's recent trip to China were key points in the discussion yesterday between American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) Chairman Raymond Burghardt and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), the DPP said.

Briefing reporters, DPP Director of International Affairs Hsiao Bi-khim (蕭碧霞) said that during the 70-minute meeting, Tsai told Burghardt the DPP was concerned about the US' stance on Taiwan as a US-China joint statement released during Obama's trip had not mentioned the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), the backbone of the Taiwan-US relationship since the two countries severed ties 30 years ago.

The absence of the TRA has worried many Taiwanese who fear the gesture was an indication of deteriorating Taiwan-US ties, Hsiao said, urging Washington to reaffirm its commitment to Taiwan.

The DPP also said the joint statement contradicted the TRA and the "six assurances," and that the US should make clear that it still adheres to the TRA and that its position on Taiwan's sovereignty has not altered.

The DPP demanded that the US reaffirm its position that cross-strait differences must "be resolved peacefully with the assent of Taiwan's people," adding that the US should make an announcement on arms sales to show the public that its commitment to the TRA has not changed.

Former representative to the US Joseph Wu (吳勝元), who was present at the meeting, told the Taipei Times that because the Ma administration was not fulfilling its responsibilities to the public, it was the DPP's duty to do so.

On US beef, Tsai reiterated the DPP position that negotiations should be reopened.

Tsai said the DPP viewed US beef imports as a public health issue although the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) had accused it of manipulating the matter for election purposes, Hsiao said.

Earlier in the day, Burghardt assured Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (王金平) that the US' Taiwan policy remained unchanged.

After briefing the speaker and several members of the Foreign and National Defense Committee on Obama's trip to China last week, Burghardt said the US had not changed its policy toward Taiwan, adding that Obama told Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) that arms sales to Taiwan would also remain unchanged. Burghardt said Obama made sure the TRA was included in a press conference after his talks with Hu.

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“That was a personal desire by him to make sure it was mentioned,” Burghardt said.

Burghardt arrived in Taipei on Sunday night to brief President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), the legislature and opposition leaders on Obama’s visit to China. KMT Legislator Lin Yu-fang (林育方) said the chairman emphasized that “the US had not changed its policy toward Taiwan nor sacrificed Taiwan’s interests during Obama’s trip.”

Burghardt told reporters that the US beef controversy was a “phony issue” being manipulated ahead of local elections.

Wang said he told Burghardt that Taiwan would like to resume talks with the US on the trade and investment framework agreement as soon as possible.

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