

Tsai inauguration a rare opportunity

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Sunday, 08 March 2020 06:55

Three US senators on Thursday last week called on US President Donald Trump to send a delegation to attend President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) second inauguration scheduled for May 20.

The move would be within the scope of the Taiwan Travel Act, which was signed into law by Trump on March 17, 2018. The act allows "officials at all levels of the United States government, including Cabinet-level national security officials, general officers and other executive branch officials, to travel to Taiwan to meet their Taiwanese counterparts."

It is also not out of the ordinary for US officials to attend foreign inaugurations. For example, a delegation led by then-US secretary of energy Rick Perry on May 20 last year attended the inauguration of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy. A Taiwanese delegation attended Trump's inauguration in 2017, much to the dissatisfaction of China, which sent a delegation led by Chinese Ambassador to the US Cui Tiankai (崔天凯).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Joanne Ou (歐陽) on Friday last week said that the government would strengthen ties with the US during Tsai's second term, and while such statements are routine, the state of US-China ties might signal new opportunities for Taiwan.

An article on the Web site of the US' National Public Radio quoted Evan Medeiros — the US National Security Council's senior director for Asian affairs under former US president Barack Obama — as saying that "right now, the US-China relationship is suffering from a deep deficit of trust." While there has always been some distrust between the two countries, it has been exacerbated by an ongoing trade dispute and "significant strategic differences," he was quoted as saying.

The US has also accused China of lacking transparency regarding COVID-19 and of failing to cooperate on combating its spread.

For its part, Beijing has slammed Washington for banning the entry of foreign nationals who were in or transited through China within 14 days prior to their arrival in the US, and for restricting the number of Chinese media personnel who could be stationed in the US. Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Hua Chunying (華春瑩) has accused the Trump

Tsai inauguration a rare opportunity

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Sunday, 08 March 2020 06:55

administration of spreading fear and panic.

Given this, the US senators' backing of Taiwan comes as no surprise, and they are not alone in expressing support. Canadian Conservative Party lawmakers on Feb. 16 challenged the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) over its exclusion of Taiwan. Canadian lawmaker James Bezan expressed his feelings toward China and his frustration over Taiwan's exclusion from the ICAO on Twitter, saying: "Has the International Civil Aviation Organization been taken over by the Communist Party of China? Hey @icao — get your facts straight! Taiwan is a thriving independent democracy."

Prior to that, in a session of parliament on Jan. 29, Canadian lawmaker Michael Cooper called on Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to explicitly state the government's position on Taiwan's inclusion in international discussions about preventing the spread of COVID-19. Trudeau responded that the Canadian government supported Taiwan's participation.

Tsai has said that a large public inauguration might not take place due to disease-prevention efforts, and it is likely the public would be supportive of this decision. A small closed-door inauguration that is livestreamed and televised would be a fitting alternative, and would be much more effective if it is attended by a US delegation.

Tsai could take the initiative by inviting delegations from the US, Canada and other like-minded democratic nations who have expressed support for Taiwan. If such delegations participated, it would set a precedent and could signal an important shift in the nation's foreign relations.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2020/03/08](#)