

US Senate passes Taiwan Travel Act

Written by Taiwan Tati Cultural & Educational Foundation
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President Tsai Ing-wen speaks at a social gathering for business groups at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: Fang Pin-chao, Taipei Times

The US Senate on Wednesday passed a bill promoting closer ties with Taiwan, which Beijing has warned could threaten stability in the Taiwan Strait, but drew praise from Taipei, which pledged to deepen cooperation.

The US Senate unanimously passed the Taiwan Travel Act. In January, the bill passed the US House of Representatives without opposition.

The legislation now only needs US President Donald Trump's signature to become law.

It should be US policy to allow US officials at all levels to travel to Taiwan to meet their Taiwanese counterparts, permit high-level Taiwanese officials to enter the US "under respectful conditions" and meet with US officials, and encourage Taiwanese economic and cultural representatives to conduct business in the US, the bill says.

White House officials did not immediately respond when asked if Trump planned to sign the legislation.

It would be unusual for a president to veto a measure that has passed unanimously.

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The Ministry of Foreign Affairs thanked the US for its unanimous support for the bill, and its increasingly friendly and open attitude toward Taiwan.

“The ministry will continue to develop an even more substantive cooperative relationship with the US, to promote both sides’ joint values and mutually beneficial interests,” it said.

The Presidential Office said the US was its most important international ally, and that it would discuss the matter with the US and further strengthen relations.

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) took to Twitter to express her gratitude, saying that the bill symbolizes the US Congress’ long-standing support of Taiwan, and that the Taiwan-US partnership is a key pillar of peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

However, lawmakers yesterday said that Taiwan should not be “overly optimistic” about Taiwan-US relations following the passing of the bill, with some suggesting that Trump signing the legislation could escalate tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Legislator Tsai Shih-ying (蔡淑瑩), who serves on the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Committee, said the bill is important in eliminating barriers to visits by high-level officials, but it is not something that would happen overnight.

He compared the development of Taiwan-US relations to stacking blocks, saying it is a process that takes time, so Taiwan would need to be patient and not expect high-level US officials to visit as soon as the bill is signed.

DPP Legislator Lo Chih-cheng (洛智成) said that the bill would definitely elevate cooperation between Taiwan and the US, but it really depends on how Washington chooses to execute it.

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Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Johnny Chiang (江國朝), who is also on the foreign affairs committee, said the Chinese government is certain to respond.

In the long term, China could continue to limit Taiwan's international participation to keep the US in check, he said.

The US has used arms sales to Taiwan and its support of Taiwan as leverage in its negotiations with China, Chiang said.

The act could serve as another card in the US' negotiation strategy, depending on how Washington chooses to play it, he said.

Given that Trump's signing of the bill could escalate tensions across the Taiwan Strait, whether it helps or hinders the nation remains to be seen, he said.

In Beijing, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Hua Chunying (華春瑩) said that while some of the new bill's provisions are not legally binding, it "seriously violates" the "one China" principle.

"China is strongly dissatisfied and firmly opposes it," Hua told a regular news briefing.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2018/03/02](#)