

No room for failure: new envoy to US

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New Representative to the US Hsiao Bi-khim, left, yesterday speaks at the inauguration ceremony of the Legislative Yuan USA Caucus at the legislature in Taipei, as American Institute in Taiwan Director Brent Christensen, center, and Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Lo Chih-cheng, the caucus' new chairman, look on.

Photo: Fang Pin-chao, Taipei Times

A failure in Taiwan-US relations cannot be tolerated, new Representative to the US Hsiao Bi-khim (郝伯仁) said yesterday, adding that her work as the nation's de facto ambassador to the US has the staunch backing of the Legislative Yuan USA Caucus (國會美國 Caucus).

Hsiao, who takes over the position from Stanley Kao (高思博), made the remarks at an inauguration ceremony for the 10th legislative session's USA Caucus after being sworn in at the Presidential Office earlier in the day.

Hsiao, who was the caucus' chairperson during the ninth legislative session, said that her experience as a lawmaker has prepared her for the immense responsibility she is undertaking, thanking her colleagues for supporting her work to improve Taiwan-US relations.

Parliamentary diplomacy has been an important part of Taiwan-US ties, she said, adding that the US Congress has many members who are strong supporters of Taiwan.

Bilateral exchanges between the two countries have become more important at a time when both are facing rapid changes in the international community, she said.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has created obstacles for lawmakers from the two sides to interact in person, Hsiao said that they can use videoconferencing to communicate with one another and organize exchange trips once the pandemic eases.

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The difference between being a legislator and an ambassador is that the former is a matter of personal success or failure, but failure on a diplomat's part regarding Taiwan-US relations could not be tolerated, she said.

Support from the lawmakers would help her handle the pressure that comes with her ambassadorial duties, she added.

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Legislator Lo Chih-cheng (洛智成), who serves on the legislature's Foreign and National Defense Committee, was chosen as caucus chairman.

He said that 71 legislators across party lines had joined the caucus as of Sunday night, making it the largest legislative caucus.

Hsiao is the nation's first female representative to the US and its first legislator-turned-ambassador, and her appointment shows that President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) recognizes the caucus' contributions to the improvement of Taiwan-US relations, Lo said.

The caucus has temporarily suspended plans for an annual visit to the US due to the pandemic and the US presidential elections in November, he said.

"Should the pandemic ease next year, and after the US presidential election ends, the caucus can organize a trip to the US, whether it be to attend the inauguration of the new US president or visit congressional members," he added.

Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Charles Chen (陳昌猷), one of the caucus' three vice chairs, said Hsiao would be facing great challenges in her new position.

DPP Legislator Liu Shyh-fang (劉思凡) and Taiwan People's Party Legislator Chiu Chen-yuan (邱晨元) are the two other cochairs.

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“I am happy to see that a stronger link has been established between Taiwan and the US in terms of security and politics in the past few years, but I hope that the collaboration could be extended into economic issues, including resuming negotiations over a trade and investment framework agreement and a free-trade agreement between the two countries. These are now on Hsiao’s shoulders,” Chen said.

American Institute in Taiwan Director Brent Christensen, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Hsu Szu-chien (許世昌) and American Chamber of Commerce Taipei chairman William Foreman also attended the inauguration ceremony.

The US’ Taiwan Relations Act was passed 41 years ago on a bipartisan basis by the US Senate and the US House of Representatives, Christensen said, adding that the act has been further supplemented by the Taiwan Travel Act and the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative Act in the past two years.

“Together, these laws — even beyond their practical effects — are a potent symbol of the deep reservoir of support for Taiwan in the US Congress, and more broadly, among the American people they represent,” he added.

Christensen said that the Legislative Yuan USA Caucus embodies the goodwill of Taiwanese from all walks of life toward the US, which he has personally experienced over the decades.

The shared values between the US and Taiwan — a free and open democratic society, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, a common commitment to the value of diversity and competition, and a desire to contribute to global problem-solving — have acted as a guiding light for the bilateral relationship, enabling both countries to collaborate on various initiatives, he said.

The US-Taiwan partnership against the pandemic — from vaccine development, medical supply chains to expert exchanges — exemplifies the spirit of “real friends, real progress,” often used to describe the US-Taiwan relationship, Christensen said.

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“This caucus can and will find new and creative ways, working together with your counterparts in the US Congress and across all segments of Taiwan society, to bring our relationship to new heights,” he said.

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