

US visit to support defense, ties: Cornyn

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A US congressional delegation led by US Senator John Cornyn, 11th left, American Institute in Taiwan Director Sandra Oudkirk, 10th left, and other officials pose for a photograph during a visit to the Presidential Office on Sunday to meet with President Tsai Ing-wen, center.

Photo: CNA

A US congressional delegation's visit to Taiwan last week was aimed at learning how Washington can help support Taipei's defense capabilities and to discuss ways to boost bilateral trade ties, US Senator John Cornyn said on Sunday.

Cornyn, who led the all-Republican delegation, said in a news release that the group had returned to the US on Sunday after concluding an Indo-Pacific trip in the past few days that took it to Taiwan, the Philippines and India "to strengthen ties with critical allies and partners to counter Chinese aggression."

The delegation consisted of US senators Mike Crapo, Mike Lee and Tommy Tuberville, as well as US representatives Tony Gonzales and Jake Ellzey, the news release said.

The delegation met with President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), as well as defense and foreign affairs leaders, in Taipei, "to learn how the US can best support Taiwan's development of domestic asymmetric defense capabilities and discuss trade relations," he said.

They also visited the world's largest semiconductor foundry to tour a fabrication facility and receive a briefing about China's efforts to threaten Taiwanese chipmaking and destabilize this critical supply chain, the news release said, referring to the headquarters of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co (TSMC, 台积电) at the Hsinchu Science Park (新竹科學園區).

After leaving Taiwan, the delegation visited India, where they met with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

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The group also met with a representative of the Dalai Lama, who spoke with the group about shared values for religious freedom and human rights, and China's repression and persecution of Tibetans, according to the press release.

"The Indo-Pacific is the largest military theater in the world, and our allies there are invaluable to ensuring we can counter China's overreach," Cornyn said.

"Our delegation was able to see firsthand the issues facing countries from mainland India to island partners in the Pacific, and I am grateful to our host nations and our servicemembers stationed there," he said.

The statement issued by Cornyn is the first time the senator made public the low-profile visit from Tuesday to Thursday last week. It was not previously announced what happened, amid rising tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

A flight tracker app showed that a US Navy C-40 Clipper military transport plane had arrived in Taiwan on Tuesday night from the Philippines, and according to reports, it was carrying the US congressional delegation.

Shortly after, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) confirmed the previously undisclosed visit, but declined to provide any details on the length of the delegation's stay or itinerary in Taiwan, citing the wishes of the US lawmakers.

After Cornyn made public their visit to Taiwan on Sunday, the ministry was finally able to confirm their three-day visit, saying they met with Tsai, National Security Council Secretary-General Wellington Koo (柯俊雄), Minister of National Defense Chiu Kuo-cheng (邱國晟) and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Harry Tseng (滕建群).

They also talked with Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳敦義) via videoconference instead of in person, because Wu was then undergoing a 14-day quarantine after returning from a trip to Europe, the ministry said.

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The ministry said the trip was the first-ever large-scale delegation to Taiwan consisting of lawmakers from the US Senate and the House of Representatives, and exemplified long-term US support for Taiwan.

Cornyn is one of the initiators of several pro-Taiwan bills in the US Senate, including the Taiwan Partnership Act that was submitted in July, calling for collaboration between the US National Guard and Taiwan's military, and the Taiwan Deterrence Act put forth earlier this month to increase military aid to Taiwan and bolster its defense, amid China's growing coercion.

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