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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs

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Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

Best wishes to you and your staff at the State Department during the coming holiday season.

On January 14, 2012, the people of Taiwan will go to the polls for both presidential and legislative elections. These elections will mark another important step forward in Taiwan's quarter century evolution from a garrison state under martial law to a democracy.

Taiwan's young democracy is still fragile with the first popular election of a president only taking place in 1996. Beijing has not lessened its attempts to interfere with Taiwan's democratic institutions and electoral process in the years since that first eventful election. Earlier this year the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Chairman warned Taiwan's voters to "choose the right person" in the upcoming presidential election. There are also recent press reports that Beijing plans to conduct a missile test in Pacific waters near Taiwan just days before Taiwan's voters go to the polls.

We must remain vigilant to uncover any other signs of continued attempts by Beijing to bully Taiwan or to again interfere with its electoral process. Similarly, the Administration must refrain from speaking and acting in any way that can be identified as supporting any particular candidate.

In September, Assistant Secretary of Commerce Suresh Kumar visited Taiwan. Earlier this month, the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, Rajiv Shah, also made an official visit to Taiwan. On December 12, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Energy Daniel Poneman arrived in Taiwan making him the most senior US official to visit Taiwan in years.

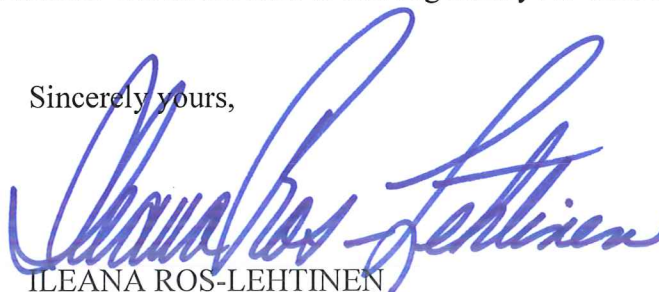
While I welcome visits by high-ranking U.S. officials, I would add a word of caution. With the elections only weeks away, U.S. officials should be careful to conduct their activities on the island in a manner which projects strict political neutrality. Official meetings with only one of the three presidential candidates could be misinterpreted by the Taiwanese electorate as an official endorsement.

Deputy Secretary Poneman also indicated United States Government support for Taiwan's participation in the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) during his visit. In addition, Committee staffers have been unofficially informed that an Administration announcement of Taiwan's nomination to participate in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) may be made before the end of this calendar year.

While I naturally endorse these actions to increase Taiwan's participation in international organizations and to strengthen its ties with the United States – VWP being an essential component of the Taiwan Policy Act which I introduced in the House in September -- the timing of these announcements again appear problematic with regard to the elections to be held in less than one month. The Taiwanese electorate could interpret these as deliverables provided by the Administration to Taiwan's current President just before he faces the voters at the polls. It would seem more prudent to schedule any long-awaited announcement on the Visa Waiver Program after the January 14th elections.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to hearing from you. And I wish you a Happy New Year!

Sincerely yours,



ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
Chairman