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Taiwan Resolution Advances as Lawmakers Eye Trade, Chip Manufacturing and USVI Free Trade Zone Potential

The resolution petitions Congress to support Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organizations, while lawmakers said stronger USVI-Taiwan ties could create economic and trade opportunities.

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Presidential Office building in Taipei, Taiwan By. GETTY IMAGES.

The 36th Legislature has advanced a resolution asking the United States Congress to support Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organizations, while lawmakers framed the measure as part of a broader effort to strengthen ties between Taiwan and the U.S. Virgin Islands

and explore potential trade and manufacturing opportunities.

Bill No. 36-0297 was special ordered to the legislative floor Thursday by Senator Hubert Frederick. The measure petitions Congress to “express its support for the solidarity with Taiwan in a quest for meaningful participation in international organization.”

According to Senator Frederick, the resolution builds on previous government efforts to advance relations between the U.S. Virgin Islands and Taiwan.

The resolution, he said, “continues strengthening our relationship with the Taiwanese because the Taiwanese are interested in a bilateral relationship with the US Virgin Islands.”

Mr. Frederick argued that a formal bilateral relationship could create “prospects of economic growth” for the territory. He pointed specifically to Taiwan’s technology sector and its role in global chip manufacturing.

“There’s a lot of Taiwanese companies who are actually the number one chip manufacturer in the world, and they would be interested in looking at the Virgin Islands, the free trade zone area, to bring manufacturing to us,” he stated.

At the same time, Senator Frederick said the territory must address infrastructure needs before such opportunities can produce tangible results. He told colleagues that the Virgin Islands must continue improving its ability to attract large businesses.

“We have some work to do to continue attracting big businesses to the US Virgin Islands. Sun [and] sand is good, but sometimes you just need warehousing,” he said.

Mr. Frederick also argued that closer business ties could benefit Taiwan. He said Taiwanese companies are aware of tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump, which he placed at 15 percent.

“The Taiwanese also are very much aware of the tariff that the President has placed on them at 15%. If they do business in the US Virgin Islands, we could get that tariff number down to 6 or 7 percent,” Senator Frederick explained.

“Southeast Asia is interested in doing business with the United States, and we should step up since we are exempt, since we are exempt from the Jones Act,” he added.

Mr. Frederick described an opportunity for the territory to use its port and trade position more strategically, including by attracting large vessels carrying goods that could be assembled or manufactured locally.

He spoke of the possibility for large vessels to “come in here filled with merchandises that we could assemble or manufacture...and turn around and start filling those empty containers that leave our shores every single day.”

The proposal received support from other lawmakers.

Senator Novelle Francis said he believes there may be opportunities worth continuing to examine. “I truly believe that there is some opportunities there that we continue to explore,” he said.

Senator Avery Lewis said he was initially skeptical of the measure, joking, “I ain’t know how we go over to Taiwan, but we make it to Ghana.” Ultimately, however, he said he could not oppose a

resolution focused on trade.

Senate President Milton Potter also supported the broader direction of the measure.

“I think we need to start thinking big, and the relationship with Taiwan, I think, is an opportunity for us to think outside the box and think big,” Mr. Potter said.

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