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民主進步黨
Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan

***Taiwan Stole His Heart* — President Lai
Ching-te Awards Mike Fonte the Order of
Brilliant Star with Grand Cordon**



"Even though the Taiwanese people have endured many hardships, they have never given up." — Mike Fonte

May 7th, 2026

On the morning of May 6th, President Lai Ching-te awarded the Order of Brilliant Star with Grand Cordon to our beloved "Uncle Mike," Michael J. Fonte, former Director of the DPP Mission to the U.S. This honor reflects the gratitude of the Taiwanese people for nearly six decades of dedication to Taiwan's democracy and the U.S.-Taiwan relationship. For those who have had the privilege of knowing Mike, it comes as no surprise — and for those who have not, his story is extraordinary.

From Missionary to Democracy Advocate: A Lifelong Bond with Taiwan

In 1967, Mike graduated from Maryknoll Seminary expecting an assignment in Tokyo, Caracas, or Santiago. Instead he was sent to the

countryside of central Taiwan – and he never truly left.

He traveled throughout Taichung, Changhua, and Miaoli, and spent six hours a day studying Taiwanese until he spoke it more fluently than many who had grown up with it. During the martial law era, he not only carried out his missionary work but devoted himself to the cause of human rights and social justice. After returning to the United States, he joined FAPA and worked tirelessly in Congress and among think tanks, becoming one of Taiwan's most steadfast supporters during some of the most uncertain moments in its history on the world stage.

A Dream That Never Faded: Taiwan's Journey Through Uncle Mike's Eyes

In his remarks, Mike looked back with deep emotion on the first Taiwanese song he ever learned, still his favorite: "**Bang Chhun-hong, "Longing for the Spring Breeze (望春風)**". Under martial law, it captured the Taiwanese people's deepest longing for freedom.

He arrived during the darkest days of authoritarian rule. He joked that if someone had predicted back then that Taiwan would become a democracy within twenty years, he would have thought they were dreaming and might have teased them with the old Taiwanese saying, "**Go to bed earlier and you'll sleep better.**" Yet, through the perseverance and courage of the Taiwanese people, that dream became reality.

Mike's years of missionary work allowed him to witness many of the key turning points in Taiwan's democratization firsthand. After returning to the U.S., he studied under Professor Peng Ming-min and formed a lifelong friendship with former Foreign Minister Chen Tang-shan, deepening his ties to Taiwan's democracy movement. He witnessed the suffering of those imprisoned after the Kaohsiung Incident, admired the courage of the defense lawyers who stood by them, and backed the birth of the Democratic Progressive Party.

Mike began serving as the DPP's Washington liaison in 2002, and in 2013 reconstituted the DPP Mission to the U.S., serving as its director until his retirement in 2024. His tireless efforts, coupled with his legendary wit and charm, helped the Mission carve out an important place in Washington's policy community.

Mike also spoke about how deeply moved he was witnessing the

Taiwanese people's determination during the 2004 "Hand-in-Hand to Protect Taiwan" rally. More than twenty years on, the challenges facing Taiwan have only grown. His message to younger generations: ***"The world needs to hear Taiwan's story. Democracy does not stand still. The will to protect Taiwan must be stronger than ever."***

Never Truly Retired: Safeguarding Democracy and Prosperity Together

From the Presidential Office, President Lai emphasized that Mike's lifelong contributions have reflected great wisdom and patience, and that he has long been a trusted bridge between Taiwan and the United States. Though Mike has retired, the President expressed hope that he will continue mentoring younger generations and passing on his deep love for Taiwan.

Uncle Mike has been a tireless champion of Taiwan's democracy, freedom, and people. From his early days as a missionary in Taichung to his decades of advocacy in Washington, Taiwan truly stole his heart — and he stole ours.

Mike, for nearly six decades of friendship, sacrifice, and belief in Taiwan, we are grateful beyond words. Forging ahead, we will strive to carry forward your work to safeguard the democracy, peace, and prosperity of our beloved Taiwan.

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民主進步黨
Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan

The Opposition Chose Politics Over Readiness

The KMT cut Taiwan's special defense budget by nearly 40%, stripped critical programs, and called it oversight. Here's what that costs.



May 8th, 2026

What Just Passed — and What It Will Really Cost

Yesterday's vote capped off months-long KMT push to gut a defense package that Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) – after extensive consultations with the U.S. – deemed essential to closing Taiwan's most urgent operational gaps.

The KMT-led legislature approved a sharply reduced version of the Special Act for the Procurement Plan to Safeguard National Security and Strengthen Asymmetric Capabilities, capping the special defense budget at NT\$780 billion (US\$24.8 billion) and stripping out commercial procurement and commissioned domestic development entirely.

The bill passed 59-0, with 48 abstentions after DPP lawmakers refused to legitimize a package they knew was strategically degraded and operationally incomplete. Even KMT veteran Jaw Shaw-kong, whose own proposal had set the floor at NT\$800 billion, publicly questioned what Chairwoman Cheng Li-wun's months of aggressive maneuvering had

actually achieved. The DPP condemned the outcome as a dangerous abdication of the legislature's responsibility to national defense.

The NT\$470 billion gap between what the Executive Yuan (EY) requested and what passed is not a rounding error, but a political choice with serious consequences for Taiwan's ability to field a complete defense.

A Bill Designed to Be Unworkable

Even as the KMT loudly claimed it is focusing on U.S. procurement, they structured the legislation into two phases, neither of which can deliver on this promise. The first allocates NT\$300 billion for the five arms sale packages already notified to Congress on December 17, 2025 — HIMARS, M109A7 self-propelled howitzers, TOW 2B missiles, Altius drones, and Javelin anti-armor missiles. As is widely known within the Beltway, LOA amounts routinely shift between the congressional notification stage and final signature; indeed, prices of both HIMARS and the M109A7 have already shifted since December. Therefore, locking prices into law before negotiations conclude strips Taiwan of flexibility it can't afford to lose.

The second phase allocates NT\$480 billion, but only for U.S. arms sales approved within one year of the act taking effect, and only within four enumerated categories. Miss the window or fall outside those categories, and the money cannot be spent — regardless of what Taiwan actually needs. Needless to say, it is presumptuous for the KMT to dictate the final policy decisions of the U.S.

As DPP Legislator Chen Kuan-ting noted for the legislative record, Taiwan's urgent capability needs will not arrange themselves to fit a statutory checklist. They may include intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, command and control, communications, electronic warfare, anti-ship capabilities, and logistics integration. China's threats don't wait for anyone's calendar, but the KMT and TPP built a bill that does.

What Got Guttled, and Why Washington Should Care

The Ministry of National Defense has made its position clear: excluding commercial procurement and commissioned development guts the integrity of Taiwan's force-building plan. The items the MND intends to acquire in these ways are not optional add-ons, but critical building blocks for Taiwan's air defense, unmanned systems, command and control, ammunition resilience, domestic defense industrial base, and joint U.S.-Taiwan R&D capacity. What the KMT cut, and what it will cost in lost capability, line by line:

- ***The Chiang-Kung medium-range anti-ballistic missile.*** The MND designed this as the backbone of Taiwan's multilayered air defense network. That program is now unfunded, while China's missile arsenal is not standing still.
- ***Unmanned aerial systems, unmanned surface systems, and counter-drone systems.*** These capabilities are essential to asymmetric warfare and to building a domestic supply chain that isn't dependent on Chinese manufacturers. Their exclusion hands Beijing a structural advantage it didn't work to earn.
- ***AI-assisted decision-making, TAK, and the Taiwan Tactical Network.*** Without these systems connecting reconnaissance, command, and rapid strike into a functioning kill chain, Taiwan's ability to translate battlefield awareness into decisive action remains incomplete.
- ***Ammunition production capacity and general-purpose munitions.*** Sustaining operations through a wartime blockade requires domestic production at scale. The KMT defunded those production lines, dealing a body blow to the Taiwanese vendors preparing to build them.
- ***Joint U.S.-Taiwan R&D and procurement cooperation.*** This was the mechanism for integrating emerging technologies alongside the United States — Taiwan's most critical security partner. Stripping it from the budget undermines an alliance that the MND has worked to deepen.

HIMARS Clock Is Still Ticking

The KMT's stalling tactics have already left a trail of damage. Review of the MND's proposal was blocked more than ten times in the Procedure Committee, with four rounds of cross-party negotiations failing. Three Letters of Offer and Acceptance expired, requiring exceptional extensions from the U.S. side. Even now, the HIMARS sale remains at risk if payment isn't completed by the end of May.

These delays have done more than disrupt Taiwan's force-building schedule. They've threatened the political trust underpinning U.S.-Taiwan defense cooperation. The KMT slow-walked negotiations from an opening offer of just over NT\$300 billion toward nearly NT\$800 billion, losing months in the process and raising doubts about Taiwan's reliability and commitment to its own defense.

What Comes Next

Legislative review can't be weaponized to obstruct defense readiness, and budget oversight can't be misused to weaken combat capabilities. Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and other Indo-Pacific partners are all increasing defense investment in response to the China threat. Taiwan, on the front line of the first island chain, can't afford to do less.

Under the act passed today, the EY must first submit a special report within one month before it can compile and submit the special budget bill. When that bill arrives, the Legislative Yuan must complete its review without further delay. The HIMARS payment deadline and other expiring procurement cases can't wait. And the capability gaps and implementation risks the MND has identified must be addressed in full.

In short, Taiwan needs a full defense, not an obstructionist budget cut.

The KMT shouldn't expect gratitude for grudgingly accepting only the sales notified by Washington.

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