AmCham China Goes to DC
Delegates discuss reform and cybersecurity issues with US officials
By XC Swanson  Photos by Stone He

For this year’s DC Outreach, a group of 11 AmCham China delegates headed to Washington and took part in a packed three-day slate of meetings with US government officials and Capitol Hill aides from April 29 to May 1. The trip included visits with staff from the Departments of Commerce, Agriculture, State, and Energy, the Office of the US Trade Representative, the US Patent and Trademark Office, the US Trade and Development Agency, and the Senate Finance and House Ways and Means Committees. To cap off the trip, on May 2 an AmCham China group led by Chamber Chairman Greg Gilligan met with recently-tapped Chinese Ambassador to the US Cui Tiankai, presenting him with the 2013 American Business in China White Paper.

Throughout the visit, delegates fielded a stream of questions on the likely direction of new leadership in China. Gilligan and Chamber President Christian Murck said early signs appear positive that the leaders would move in the direction of reform, and in a subsequent meeting Ambassador Cui reiterated top-level interest in further reform and opening.

To kick off this year’s Outreach, AmCham China sponsored an event featuring a moderated discussion on US-China relations by former CIA director Gen. Michael Hayden, followed by separate panel discussions on cybersecurity and the outlook for reform in China. On the cybersecurity front—a hot topic in Washington—Hayden presented two scenarios. On the one hand, concerns about the integrity of corporate data could strain bilateral relations. In a more constructive scenario, cybersecurity could serve as an issue on which the US and China collaborate to craft new international norms of behavior. After Hayden’s talk, a panel of experts agreed that cyberlooting hurts business confidence and the specter of such risks could affect decisions on investment, R&D, and staff.

The panel on the reform outlook in China also examined the current framework for bilateral talks. One suggestion: a more process-oriented structure that included longer meetings with a small number of high-level leaders may prove more effective than the big, heavily attended annual trade talks “events” that weigh heavily in the government calendar. A panelist also noted that in addition to bilateral talks, the Bilateral Investment Treaty, Cooperative Partnership, and Government Procurement Agreement all offer venues to address the preferential subsidies and other special privileges granted to Chinese state-owned firms that disadvantage their private-sector competitors.