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Republic of Taiwan: A nation striving for excellence

by Virgil Smith, Chairman of the Asheville Citizen-Times
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EDITOR'S NOTE: Joann and Virgil Smith visited Taiwan at the invitation of Dr. Stephen C. J. Chang on behalf of Taiwan's Government Information Office. The trip was paid for by the Republic of China (Taiwan) government with the exception of transportation for Joann. During the visit to Taiwan they spoke with people in education, economic development, healthcare, print and broadcast media; cultural historians; and leaders of foreign affairs.

The overriding issue facing the Republic of China (ROC) government is its relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC). This issue drives the extraordinary achievements of this nation of 23 million people who occupy an area of 36,000 kilometers, making Taiwan one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Taiwan (ROC) is an important strategic partner for the United States and the nation has a strong commitment to democracy and a free society with a free press and strong economic engine.

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Taiwan's only American convenience store. Taiwan considers itself a sovereign nation that is separate from mainland China and does not see a need to declare its independence.

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Taiwan's democracy. A

military conflict would impact the entire world and would be devastating for democracy in Asia. The mainland China issue is complicated by the "Anti-Secession Law" passed by the PRC in March 2005. Article 8 stipulates that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of the PRC and authorizes non-peaceful means and other necessary measures to achieve its goal of unification with Taiwan.



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Taiwan considers itself a sovereign nation that is separate from mainland China and does not see a need to declare its independence. Taiwanese see the Anti-Secession Law as an excuse for China to take control of their nation.

This issue is a driving force for motivating Taiwanese leaders to demonstrate their capability to compete in the international community, as indicated by their strong belief that they should hold membership in the United Nations and other respected associations such as the World Health Organization.

Taiwan is a beautiful country with beautiful mountain ranges and beaches that are reminiscent of the mountains of Western North Carolina and our state's coastal beaches. The capital of Taiwan is Taipei, a beautiful world-class city with a population of 3 million people, about the size of Chicago. Taipei offers historical cultural museums that display artifacts that are thousands of years old. It's a modern city that offers light rail, modern and historical architecture and claims the world's second-tallest building called "101 Taipei" for its 101 floors. The city offers high-end malls and thousands of restaurants. Taiwan recently completed a high-speed train that reportedly travels at 250 to 300 miles per hour from the northern city of Taipei to the southern costal city of Tainan. Home of the world famous and historical Confucius Temple, Tainan's economic vision is to transform a farming and tourism city to a sustainable economy focused on cultural arts and technology according to Mayor Tain-Tsair Hsu. The goals are very closely related to the goals of the HUB Project www.asheville.hub.org for Asheville and Buncombe County in terms of creating a sustainable community development plan and collaborative climatic strategy.

Driving strategic focus

It is clear that the relationship with the People's Republic of China drives the strategic focus for Taiwan. Taiwan's mission is to compete in the international community and demonstrate to the world that it is an independent nation and not a territory of mainland China. Taiwan does not have full diplomatic representation or an abundance of natural resources. However, it is seeking to show the world its competence and success, an example of which is its ranking as the 16th largest trader and 18th largest economy in the world. Taiwanese leaders have identified their primary natural resource as their people. As a result they have focused initiatives on education, national healthcare, entrepreneurial innovation, free speech, economic development and celebration of their historic culture. Taiwan's prosperity and its quality of life, supported by universal health care, educational success in public schools and the high percentage of people earning college or university degrees, are the results of this strategy. There is a heavy emphasis on metrics for comparison with other industrialized nations. This is evident in every segment of government and in the public sector, where businesses compete for market share and seek to expand their global market position with international trade agreements.

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Lessons for WNC

What can we learn from the Taiwanese for Western North Carolina? First we have to raise our expectations for educational achievement. The key for the Taiwanese success is their uncompromising respect for teachers and high expectation of family participation in student achievement. The Taiwanese expect high performance from everyone involved in the education of their children. Locally, the Asheville-Buncombe Education Coalition www.abeducationcoalition.org is focused on similar goals of family participation and support of teachers for improving public education.

All Top Jobs

About Top Jobs

Taiwan's national healthcare program is affordable and is working. Americans are faced with rising health care and prescription costs with no end in sight. We can and should hold presidential and congressional candidates accountable for resolving the increasing cost of health care and eliminating health disparity. Western North Carolina is fortunate to have Mission Hospitals <http://missionhospitals.org/>, the Buncombe County Medical Society www.bcmsonline.org/, the Asheville Buncombe Institute of Parity Achievement www.abipa.org and other health agencies that offer services for the indigent population.

Economic strategy

Taiwan's economic development is driven by a strategic focus on collaboration and understanding the importance of working together to leverage their assets and support technological advancement for competing globally. In our region, AdvantageWest <http://www.advantagewest.com/> serves as the regional economic development organization that provides an array services to regional economic growth.

Taiwan is executing a shared vision for the betterment of its citizens and for positioning itself as a respected member of the international community. The shared vision and determination of the Taiwanese people should inspire us to set our standards and goals higher and to work harder to achieve them.

Relationship with Mainland China

Dr. Chen-yuan Tung, Vice Chairman, Mainland Affairs Council. The strategic objective for Taiwan is to "normalize relations and face the reality that the Chinese government is reluctant to recognize Taiwan as an independent nation," according to Tung. Taiwan seeks to open communication channels with high-level Chinese leaders and develop cooperation between the two nations that will bring about a peaceful solution, which would include an integration of societies, trade, cultural and political interests. However, Tung said that China poses a serious military threat with over 1,000 missiles currently pointed at Taiwan. He compared this with the Cuban Missile Crisis, where 47 missiles were pointed at the United States in the early 1960s. Tung believes that China is using the unification issue as an excuse for its military expansion.

Vice Chairman Tung and Director General Abraham Wen-shang Chu discussed their concern about the consequences for Taiwan if competing Chinese leaders are not able to control the military, which could severely impact Taiwan and international stability. More than 1 million Taiwanese people live in China and 4.4 million people travel to China annually, while 950,000 Chinese travel to Taiwan. They see this

regular communication and visitation as part of a long-term strategy of building relationships with the people and the positive impact of a democratic society. Tung stated, "There is a need for the United States to build business interests that support Taiwan's sovereignty."

Education

Dr. Mu-lin Lu, Political Deputy Minister, and Ministry of Education: Unlike most cities in the United States, Taiwan has a surplus of teachers. Teachers enjoy high occupational prestige and overall greater satisfaction with their jobs, despite salaries being consistent with most public employees. The educational leaders believe that teacher satisfaction, families' commitment to education and economic reasons result in public schools outperforming private schools in their country. Moreover, 88 percent of the high school graduates pursue higher education, with 33,000 Taiwanese students attending American colleges and universities yearly, according to Taiwanese officials. Of these, 90 percent are expected to return to Taiwan to live and work.

In the United States, some of our educational measurements include high school graduation rates, education as a percent of annual budgets and revenue per student. Taiwan uses similar measurements for education and far exceeds North Carolina performance by spending less and getting more. The high school graduation rate was reported to be 99 percent, compared to 68.7 percent for North Carolina public school students. With regard to funding, North Carolina allocates approximately 58 percent of the state annual budget for K-12 and higher education, and allocates \$7,300 per student for K-12. Taiwan allocates 22 percent of its national budget for all levels of public education and spends an average of \$3,000 per student in K-12 each year.

The educators are continuing to seek improvements in the quality of education they deliver. A specific target is to reduce the national average class size from 35 students in junior high school and achieve the goal of diversifying and individualizing education for each student. A local high school in Taipei averaged 44 students per class with one teacher. Each student was classified as performing at a high level. A strategy employed at the high schools has students remaining in the same classroom during the day. The teachers rotate to the classrooms as opposed to the students changing classrooms. This strategy eliminates students roaming the halls during class changes and provides more time for actual learning.

Health care

Ms. Su-lin Tsai, Counselor, Department of Health Executive Yuan. The mission of the Health Department of Taiwan is a "Healthy Taiwan for all its citizens." The central strategy to achieve this mission is the National Health Insurance, implemented in 1995. It is characterized as the most important social construction since the start of the Republic. The program requires mandatory social insurance for every citizen of Taiwan. Ninety-nine percent of the population receives universal coverage, according to Counselor Tsai. This includes vision, dental and medical coverage. The medical premium is a reported average of \$20 per month per person depending upon their annual income. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 47 million Americans or 16 percent of the population, does not have health insurance. Counselor Tsai reported that with the advancement of public health, infant mortality rate in 2005 was 5.0

deaths per 1,000 live births compared to 15.5 in 1991; this is a result of strategic advances in public health. Such astounding results are accomplished with a budget that is 2.6 percent of the Central Government Budget. Taiwan is very proud of its progress in health care over the last decade and would like to share its results in the global arena. The issue of re-entering membership in the World Health Organization (WHO) is of great concern to Taiwan, as they were one of the founding nations.

Economic development

Dr. York Liao, Secretary General, Council for Economic Planning and Development. A key concept of Taiwan's Economic Development Vision and Targets for 2015 is to "create incentive for the private sector to work hard," according to Liao. The belief is the private sector will provide stability, high disposable income, more consumption, production and more jobs. Dr. Liao called this the "positive cycle."

The national economic development policy includes a first stage three-year strategy of creating a prosperous economy, sustaining a green environment, developing a knowledge-based economy, emerging as a "green silicon island" and offering a caring and just society where all the people share in the benefits of economic development and are able to enjoy equal quality of life and security. Taiwan has outlined four broad strategies: increase investment in Taiwan, create job opportunities, reduce the urban-rural divide and narrow the gap between rich and poor. Some 21.6 percent of Taiwan's exports go to mainland China. Much like in the United States, the service industry is growing and stands as the largest sector for employment. Taiwan defines its service industries as financial, academic, government, tourism and recreation, healthcare, cultural and performing arts, engineering, technology development, environmental protection, communication, and information services. Another key economic development area is the focus on climate. Taiwan will participate in APEC as they see climate as an important issue in their country and the world.

Virgil Smith is Chairman of the Asheville Citizen-Times and Vice President/Talent Management for the Gannett Co. Inc. E-mail Vsmth@gannett.com.



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