

Burgy has come back, with a major beef

Written by Joe Doufu 000

Saturday, 04 February 2012 09:07

American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) Chairman Raymond Burghardt is in town this week on one of his periodic vacations from the rigors of life in Hawaii. While here he will also take time out to glad-hand the victors of last month's election and catch up with what's going on politically in post-election Taiwan.

Trouble is, Ray may have a hard time getting a complete view of what's going down this time around, as Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (000) is still in a major hissy fit with the US over its perceived interference in the election.

Tsai has been anything but "Paal-y" with Burgy and has in fact totally blown him off, deciding instead to stay down south and leave him to meet with her foreign policy expert Hsiao Bi-khim (000)

Tsai's behavior is odd, to say the least. Given that the DPP has been backed into a corner by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT)-Chicom alliance, one would think she and the DPP would need all the friends they could get.

Of course, the other major item on Burgy's Taiwan menu is US beef, an issue that has been on the back burner longer than a Texas barbeque brisket.

Personally, I can't see what all the fuss is about. After all, our American friends have been eating the stuff for years without much trouble, although I think maybe one or two of the Republican presidential candidates may be showing the first tell-tale signs of BSE.

Anyway, a source of mine who lunches with Burgy whenever he visits tells me that the beef issue remains the major thorn in the side of Taipei-Washington relations, bigger than anyone in Taiwan realizes. So Burgy was basically in town to bully about the beef.

And when Uncle Sam says jump, even the KMT will make an effort to lift both feet off the ground simultaneously — if only for a nanosecond — hence President Ma Ying-jeou's (000)

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announcement that his new Cabinet will “discuss” US beef exports next week.

There’s certainly no time like the present for Ma to act on the beef issue. If he has been reading Tsai’s copy of *Politics for Dummies*, then he would know that one’s political capital is highest immediately after an election and that now is the best time to push through unpopular measures.

I, for one, am not too concerned about the prospect of ractopamine-laced US ruminant flesh being allowed back onto our supermarket shelves. It is my belief that people should take responsibility for what they shove down their own throats. After all, the government and health authorities did a piss-poor job protecting the health of citizens when it came to plasticizers in drinks. That nasty stuff had been floating around in drinks for several years before anyone even noticed.

If people are really worried that they are going to start mooing like a horny heifer after consuming US beef, then just don’t buy beef. It’s that simple.

Ma’s trouble, however, is that last time around several KMT politicians — most notably food science expert and Taipei Mayor Hau Lung-bin (郝龍斌) — made a big deal of encouraging the public to reject US beef.

One would think that having a PhD in food science would mean that Hau would take a fact-based view on the issue of mad cow disease, but I guess populism and the chance to demonize the US while currying favor with the KMT’s new-found Chinese friends was just too much to resist.

Either way, if Ma pushes the issue in the face of resistance, then certain people in the upper echelons of the KMT could look foolish and begin to push back.

And like imported US beef, Ma is not known for his backbone. Expect him to cave in to the pressure at the first available opportunity.

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