

“How credible are President Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九) words?” is an oft-repeated question these days, even among members of his own Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), after Ma reportedly set his sights on another term as party chairman.

Putting aside the legal debate surrounding the Civil Organization Act (黨章) on whether he is even eligible to run again, Ma, from the perspective of political accountability, would be well advised to review his past rhetoric and his performance as party chairman before deciding whether a third term would be beneficial to the party or his own political track record.

Among the responsibilities of a party leader is to be supportive of members’ electoral bids, by taking part in election rallies and street processions to campaign for party nominees.

Ma has clearly failed in that aspect. In recent weeks, he has been conspicuous by his absence from campaign events for KMT candidate Yen Kuan-hen (顏寬恒), who is running in Saturday’s legislative by-election in Greater Taichung.

Media reports quoted party sources as saying the general opinion within the KMT’s Taichung branch was that it should distance itself from Ma as much as possible in this campaign, fearing his bottom-scrapping approval ratings would hurt Yen’s chances.

Despite this shunning, the KMT’s Central Standing Committee yesterday passed a provisional motion — with applause — to approve Ma’s eligibility to run for the chairmanship a third time. If Ma does make another run at the job, the question KMT members should ask themselves is: “Do we want a chairman who cannot campaign for us?”

The latest survey by the ERA Survey Research Center suggested the approval rating for Ma as president has slumped to 13.7 percent, far lower than his arch-nemesis, former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), ever dropped (18 percent).

While Ma may argue that survey results should be mere references, his unprecedented low

## Ma's swelling credibility gap

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rating suggests that his rationale for doubling as head of the state and the head of the governing party is no longer valid.

Ma said his decision to run for KMT chairman in 2009 was prompted by his sense of responsibility for the government's performance, and that it would be easier for him to push policies and boost the government's performance if he were also KMT chairman. Three years hence and the Ma administration's performance record is anything but stellar.

Many people recall how Ma accused Chen when he was president of being power-hungry by doubling as Democratic Progressive Party chairman. Even more vivid is the recollection of Ma saying, after becoming president in May 2008, that he would not serve as KMT chairman so that he could rise above partisanship and be a "president of the people." He was repeating a pledge he made on Oct. 3, 2007, when he said: "While the KMT has no regulation stipulating that the president must double as the party chairman, under no circumstance will I ever run for party chairman should I be elected president."

Who serves as KMT chairman is the party's own business. However, as Ma has performed so poorly working two jobs at one time, he should reconsider his plans to run for the party leadership post for a third time.

Abstaining would not only benefit the KMT, but would also help the nation and Ma's own credibility.

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