

US shutdown reflects KMT attitudes

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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People in most nations have looked on with disbelief this week as the US federal government almost ground to a halt, shutting down all “non-essential services,” everything from national parks and computer Web sites to food and benefit programs for needy women and children.

It seems hard to believe that the members of one political party, the Republicans, could hold an entire nation to ransom, largely because of their dislike of one law: the Affordable Care Act. Their intransigence is harming hundreds of thousands of federal workers, the communities they live and spend money in, and the global economic system because of the risk that the US might default on its debt payment this month.

It is not the first time Republicans have shutdown the US government — a clash with then-US president Bill Clinton over spending on Medicare, public health, education and other issues in 1995 led to Washington shuttering its doors for 28 days.

The shutdown is costing the US hundreds of millions of US dollars every day in lost economic output. Moody’s Analytics has estimated that if the current situation lasts about the same amount of time as the 1995 shutdown — four weeks — it would cut the US’ fourth-quarter economic growth by 1.4 percentage points. The trickle-down effect means that many countries will feel some economic pain as their products and services go unpurchased.

Unfortunately for Taiwanese, such antics in the halls of lawmaking have a familiar ring. For more than a decade, lawmakers have blocked budget acts and other legislation to score political points, all the time claiming that they are complying with the wishes of the people who elected them.

During the eight years that former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) was in power, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) — in denial that it could have actually lost power after running the Republic of China as its own fiefdom for decades — did everything it could to sabotage his administration’s plans.

KMT members and their allies on the legislature’s Procedure Committee often blocked acts from ever making it onto the floor or used their legislative majority to vote down proposals and

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budgets on everything from much needed weapons purchases to anti-flood and economic stimulus measures. They also blocked a number of Chen's personnel appointments and made several attempts to recall or impeach the then-president.

With the election of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), the KMT returned to the Presidential Office, but its legislative caucus continued to act like a bully. Like their man in power, caucus members have become even more autocratic, unwilling to even listen to opposing viewpoints much less concede that someone with an alternative outlook might have a valid argument.

Meanwhile, the pan-green camp of Democratic Progressive Party and Taiwan Solidarity Union lawmakers have maintained the combative stance they have had since the very first years they were allowed into the legislature — forced to shout amid the closed ears of their pan-blue colleagues.

Every issue is dragged down into the color bog, even when it is something that should cross political lines such as acts to curb violence against women, improve the education system, build better flood defenses and a more sustainable energy system, or boost the economy.

Like the Republicans in the US, Taiwan's lawmakers seem to have developed a specialty for destructive rather than constructive lawmaking.

Many members of the US Congress are now making a show of refusing to take paychecks for the length of time the government is shut down.

Perhaps it is time that Taiwanese voters request their legislators forgo some of their salaries when their inability to compromise and cooperate damages the nation. That is one incentive that could spur constructive lawmaking.

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