

Sean Lien already seems insincere

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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While Taipei mayoral hopefuls independent Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) and Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) candidate Sean Lien (連戰) have voiced consent on holding a debate, it seems that Lien is somehow insincere about his willingness to engage in a debate and reluctant to face voters directly, making it questionable that he would be a good, responsive mayor if elected.

Since earlier this month, Ko has been challenging Lien to a debate on their respective policy platforms, and while Lien quickly agreed to it, his campaign executive director Alex Tsai (蔡正元) has stipulated many conditions for the debate, which seems to be a de facto rejection of Ko's invitation.

When Ko first asked his KMT rival to debate policy with him, Tsai said the debate should focus on women's issues and that the host of the debate had to be a woman, since, at the time, Ko was at the center of some controversies for remarks he made that were criticized as sexist.

It is true that gender issues are important, but it does not make sense at all that Lien would accept Ko's challenge to debate policy ideas, then stipulate that "by the way, the debate topic should be about women," not to mention that whether the host is a man or a woman is totally irrelevant.

So, although Lien said "yes" to Ko's proposal, the prospect has since faded in light of the conditions that Lien's camp put forth.

Nevertheless, Ko continued to repeatedly propose the idea, and a second opportunity arose when representatives from the two camps met to negotiate details of the debate. However, the negotiation did not go smoothly, because Lien's camp insisted that the debate involve multiple cross-examinations and rebuttals between the candidates, but rejected the idea of taking questions from civic groups or voters, while Ko's camp said it believed that responding to questions from voters would be essential.

Although the dispute may seem irrelevant, it is significantly symbolic.

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A mayor is elected — at least theoretically — because voters believe that the person can solve their problems and improve the lives of the city's residents.

Hence, it is very important for a candidate to face voters directly, take their questions, respond to them and show voters what solutions there are to the problems troubling them, as well as presenting a vision for the city's future.

A mayoral candidate's ideas and policy proposals for a city can be well demonstrated while answering questions from civic groups or voters. When a question-and-answer session takes place during a debate, voters get the opportunity to hear clear responses to their queries from all competing candidates and make comparisons, which is very helpful when casting a ballot at a polling station.

Although it is equally important for the two candidates to challenge and question each other in a debate, this happens almost every day. Whenever Ko makes a comment, whether it is a policy proposal or criticism of Lien, the media take the comment to Lien and ask for his response. Such "crossfire" has been going on since the day both candidates decided to run in the election, and therefore it is not as important for them to have multiple exchanges during the debate as it is for them to answer questions from the public.

If Lien is reluctant to take questions from voters now, when he is in the midst of soliciting their support, it is hard to imagine that he will be willing to listen to and respond to Taipei residents if he is elected.

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