

As expected, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Legislator Su Jia-chyuan (蘇嘉全) was elected speaker of the Legislative Yuan yesterday, garnering support from all 68 DPP lawmakers, five New Power Party legislators and one independent.

As the first non-Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) member to preside over the nation's lawmaking body, Su no doubt shoulders high expectations from the public, which also looks forward to a new legislature undertaking root-and-branch reforms and bringing about improved legislative quality.

In the past, the inefficiency of the KMT-controlled legislature has been disheartening. It has also been difficult to watch the KMT's attempts to muzzle its lawmakers to prevent them expressing their views on the legislative floor by instructing them to vote according to the party line instead of listening to their constituencies. And who could forget the numerous times in which KMT lawmakers chose to cover up for the executive branch by opposing the public.

Now that the legislature has been renewed — with a different political party holding the majority — many Taiwanese hope that the newly elected lawmakers can genuinely commit to serving in the public interest.

Following the speakership election, Su announced his resignation from all DPP posts and said that he would not attend any party events in order to establish impartiality.

However, legislative reform rests not only on having the legislative speaker being more neutral, but also so much more.

Aside from making the legislative agenda more effective and negotiations more transparent, it is also the public's expectation that all the newly sworn in lawmakers will break away from their party lines and serve the public.

The new legislature also needs to empower itself. While the design of the separation of powers

Time for the elected to earn respect

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in the Constitution currently assigns the right of investigation to the Control Yuan, the Control Yuan has been malfunctioning. By empowering the legislature with the right to investigate, including document requests, holding legally binding hearings and compulsory testimony, it allows the legislature to seek the truth behind potential corruption or wrongdoing.

Bills governing the monitoring of cross-strait agreements, and the handover of presidential and vice presidential duties, as well as amendments to the “bird-caged” Referendum Act (公投法) and the Civil Servants Election and Recall Act (公職人員選舉罷免法), ought to be high on the legislature’s agenda.

Now that the KMT has been reduced to 35 legislature seats, the DPP has an opportunity to demonstrate its resolve for reform by addressing the issue of transitional justice, such as the KMT’s ill-gotten assets.

“The new legislature will be a legislature of the people that is marked by openness, professionalism and the absence of ‘backroom deals,’” Su said yesterday, promising also to unite lawmakers across party lines to push for bills conducive to public welfare and doing what is right by the public.

Indeed, lawmakers are elected to serve the public and work toward the common good. As such, the new legislature certainly has its work cut out for it if it expects to live up to public expectations.

As we mark Su’s pledges, we can look forward to lawmakers — governing and opposition alike — hopefully putting an end to their past childish battles and striving to represent the concerns of their constituencies.

So, lawmakers, it is time to roll up your sleeves, get to work and earn the respect of the people who entrusted you with legislative power.

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