President Tsai Ing-wen, second row, sixth left, poses for a picture with the attendees at the Youth Policy Forum's national conference at the Ministry of Education in Taipei yesterday. **Photo: CNA**

President Tsai Ing-wen (□□□) yesterday reiterated her administration's commitment to pension reform, saying that she will take full responsibility for its effects, following a protest on Saturday against the government's planned reforms.

Tsai proposed four principles for reform: an across-the-board protection of retirement benefits; a scientific assessment of pension schemes; a sustainable and practical management of pension funds; and a democratic reform process.

Tsai made the remarks at a Youth Policy Forum conference hosted by the Ministry of Education in Taipei.

All retirees should be entitled to a sustainable pension that supports basic necessities, Tsai said, adding that changes to income replacement ratios, the government funding ratio of pension funds and payment requirements need to be based on rigorous calculations.

Management of pension funds has to be sustainable and pragmatic, she said, adding that improvements are needed to raise the funds' performance and investment returns.

The reform process has to be democratic and transparent to make way for substantial discussions, Tsai said.

“The sole purpose of building a just and sustainable pension system is to take care of future generations. We will continue on the road to reform to ease the burden on the younger generation and ensure a stable retirement income,” Tsai said.

“As the president, I will take on the stress of reforms,” she added.

A determined government would not waver in its duty to carry out reforms even if opinion polls are not satisfactory, Tsai said, adding that structural reform is a long-term process in which there are no noticeable short-term results, but confusion and unrest.

A nation would fall if its government rules according to public sentiment, while a government would collapse if it only focuses on long-term goals, Tsai said, adding that her administration will try to “keep a better balance.”

She urged a crowd of about 100 attendants, mostly college students, to address issues such as pension reform, long-term care, industry innovation and constitutional reforms.

Tsai told them to be persistent when advocating a cause, because government officials need to be constantly reminded of the importance of certain issues.

“You might as well pound the table if [government officials] do not pay attention for a third time,” she said.

“However, there is no need to protest unless it is absolutely necessary. Protest is a right of every person, but it is more important to engage in reasonable discussion following a protest,” Tsai said.

Responding to a question on how the education system can be reformed to relieve high-school

students from standardized tests, Tsai said high-school curriculum needs substantial reform to eliminate unnecessary studies so students can be engaged in life, as such engagement is lacking in the nation's education system.

A three-year college degree program might be implemented to give students more time to be involved in non-academic work, she said.

Tsai encouraged young people to become entrepreneurs instead of confining themselves as employees, because industrial transition is key to building a better working environment at a time when numerous small and medium-sized enterprises are having difficulty keeping up with the competition and committing to worker welfare./p>

Premier Lin Chuan (□□) said the government respects Saturday's protest and the opinions voiced there, but added that dialogue is needed to reach a consensus about pension reform.

Lin called on young people to engage in public issues and criticize government policies to boost communication between the public and the government.

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