

A lawmaker who keeps his promises

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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On Dec. 25 last year, New Power Party (NPP) Executive Chairman Huang Kuo-chang (黃國昌), elected as legislator for New Taipei City's 12th district, received a Christmas gift from the Greater Taipei Stability Power Alliance.

Alliance chairman Sun Chi-cheng (孫志誠) announced that his group had collected 3,124 valid signatures to file a petition for Huang's recall.

The petition was started primarily because of Huang's stance on marriage equality legislation.

Article 76 of the Civil Servants Election and Recall Act (公職人員選舉罷免法) states that applications for a recall petition have to be signed by at least 1 percent of the total voters in the elected official's district — 2,511 signatures in Huang's case.

Article 81 of the act states that at least 10 percent of the district's voters — 25,119 signatures — are required to launch a recall vote.

These thresholds were recently lowered from 2 percent and 13 percent respectively, through amendments to the law that, ironically, the NPP supported, as it made it easier for voters to recall elected officials.

Huang has long been an advocate of the legalization of same-sex marriage. Although people seeking his recall say they did not know his stance on the issue when he ran for election, Huang on March 3 reiterated that he had made his position clear during his campaign.

Alliance secretary-general Yu Hsin-yi (余心儀) on April 8 said: "Have voters ever given Huang the authority to push for homosexual marriage? He is ignoring public opinion."

Let us put aside for a moment that Yu also ran in last year's legislative elections for the Faith

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and Hope League — on a platform opposing marriage equality — and the league failed to win a single seat.

Let us also forget that the Council of Grand Justices issued a constitutional interpretation on May 24 in favor of the legalization of same-sex marriage and Yu responded by saying that it was wrong for the “lawmaking body to interfere with justice.”

The point here is not what one’s stance is on any specific issue; it is about the principle of elected representatives and their tacit contract with their constituents. It is about what powers are invested in these representatives and for what reasons these might be wrested from them by a small percentage of the electorate.

First, have voters given Huang the authority to push for marriage equality? If he had made his stance clear on that particular issue at the time of his election campaign, that is exactly what they did.

Second, is he ignoring public opinion? No, with a Ministry of Justice online poll on same-sex marriage released on Oct. 31 last year showing that 71 percent of respondents supported a marriage equality law.

What Huang is doing is respectfully disagreeing with the opinion of opponents of a long-held stance on which he campaigned.

Voters cannot agree with everything the lawmaker they send to the legislature believes in. They will also vote for them on the basis of the party they stand for, the strength of that person’s convictions and their moral fortitude as a candidate.

It is good that the threshold to recall a legislator is not so unsurmountable that it essentially blocks the electorate out of that process. That way, it is possible for voters to remove lawmakers who continually fail to carry out their responsibilities, renege on their campaign promises, consistently act in dubious ways, lack moral fortitude or disingenuously fail to faithfully represent the people of their constituency.

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That is not what is happening here.

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