

Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Chairman Wu Den-yih (吳敦義) on Saturday urged the public to give the party another chance in the nine-in-one elections on Nov. 24 to “rebuild a happy and prosperous Taiwan, and a respected Republic of China,” promising the party would strive to achieve an honest government, a robust economy and a harmonious society.

Taiwanese are certainly no misers when it comes to giving politicians a second chance, as long as they can prove they can be responsive to voters' demands.

However, in view of the party's response to former president Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) indictment, it appears the KMT still has a long way to go to convince the public it complies with the principle of accountability and is capable of making moral judgements when it comes to political choices.

Ma on Tuesday last week was charged with breach of trust and breaches of the Securities and Exchange Act (證券交易法) for his alleged involvement in the KMT's disposal of party assets in 2005 and 2006 when he was KMT chairman, including Central Motion Picture Corp, China Television Co, Broadcasting Corp of China and the former KMT headquarters.

As Ma defended himself against the charges, Wu on Saturday said that all KMT officials believed Ma to be a person of ethics and personal integrity, and the party would collect evidence to support him.

Indeed, in a democratic society under the rule of law, everyone is innocent until proven guilty. Given Ma is a senior KMT member, it is also understandable that his party would want to come to his aid as a show of camaraderie.

However, if Wu and other party officials are leaping to Ma's defense simply because he is a KMT member and have not studied the indictment, then they are letting emotion cloud their judgement in a grave case that has implications for the party's greater good.

KMT's unendearing display

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According to the indictment, which is supplemented with transcripts of recordings provided by witnesses and defendants, as well as statements made by members of the KMT's top echelon and Central Standing Committee members of the time, Ma stands accused of approving an elaborate, eight-step financial scheme in which the party lost NT\$7.3 billion (US\$238.8 million) by selling the assets at below market value.

The indictment quoted remarks by Wu, who was KMT secretary-general at the time, expressing concern in 2008 to then-KMT chairman Wu Po-hsiung (吳伯雄) that the sale of Central Motion Picture Corp "might run into problems in the future," as well as comments by former KMT secretary-general Chan Chun-po (陳俊波) calling the sales "ridiculous" and questioning whether the deal constituted "fraud through engaging in a fictitious trade."

While it remains to be seen how the case will play out in court, given issues such as whether the court will accept the recordings as evidence and debate over whether Ma had substantial decisionmaking power, as he did not have a managerial position in the companies, among other issues, one thing is certain: The sale of the companies did not go through approval by their respective boards. Regardless, the loss of NT\$7.3 billion means the KMT is the victim.

However, instead of assessing the facts for the greater interest of the party, some KMT members have been quick to brand the indictment political persecution against Ma by the Democratic Progressive Party government.

In light of their response, as well as Wu's remarks on Saturday, it looks like the KMT only has eyes on political gains ahead of the year-end elections. It seems it will not seek the truth about the party's lost assets, but is interested in only inciting contention between the pan-blue and pan-green camps.

If these are the party's values on display, it only has itself to blame for people not giving it another chance.

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