

Referendums must be more practical

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The drive for signatures for national referendums to coincide with the Nov. 24 nine-in-one elections has ramped up, with two issues standing out: three proposals against same-sex marriage and a proposal to change Taiwan's designation from Chinese Taipei to Taiwan at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

The same-sex marriage proposals represent the downside to putting so much power in the hands of the public — it gives hate groups a voice and a chance to further propagate their ideas. These anti-LGBTQ organizations have been making noise for a long time, but this actually legitimizes their cause in the eyes of the public by giving them a concrete reason and target to go out and persuade people to agree with their views.

It also provides the government with more excuses to keep ignoring the issue until it automatically goes into effect next year, as it has maintained that more reviews are necessary before enacting legislation to formally legalize gay marriage, because there are still parts of society that do not agree — even though it is just a small segment of society that seems to openly bash same-sex marriage.

This segment has now been given a weapon to further their hateful agenda of discrimination — just by virtue of gathering enough signatures. There should be some sort of mechanism to filter or regulate these petitions, otherwise the government will be dealing with more than it can handle. Seeing the success of these petitions may encourage other people who want to further their agenda to do so, and what should have been a wonderful democratic gesture could turn into nothing but a tool for divisionism and discrimination.

Furthermore, the Council of Grand Justices has already ruled that not allowing same-sex marriages is unconstitutional, and even if the government does nothing, they will become legal next year. The only possible effect is that since the referendum specifically refers to the Civil Code, the government may be compelled to enact a special law to allow same-sex marriage, which most LGBTQ advocates are adamantly against, as they want equal rights, not special rights.

No petition will be able to undermine same-sex marriage, and these anti-LGBTQ groups know it. They just want more exposure and, hopefully, to strike a blow to the LGBTQ community by not letting them completely get their way. This is basically an insult to democracy and a total

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waste of public resources, as the Central Election Committee estimates that one referendum would cost NT\$450 million (US\$14.6 million), with each additional referendum costing NT\$100 million.

The Olympic name change is a different matter — it is a given that most Taiwanese want to participate in international events as Taiwan, not under the hated name Chinese Taipei. However, this will likely prove to be largely symbolic, because even if the government responds and changes the team's name to Taiwan, it would still need the approval of the International Olympic Committee. If the committee says no, will Taiwanese athletes stay home in protest and waste four years of preparation, like the nation did in 1976 and 1980?

Yes, the petition will rattle Beijing (it has already responded through the East Asian Youth Games incident) and provide a chance to show the world what Taiwan wants, a voice that is often drowned out by Beijing's constant propaganda. However, in the end, it is not practical. On Monday, the Chinese Taipei Olympians Association spoke out, expressing concern that the referendum would cost Taiwan its membership in the International Olympic Committee. It is a legitimate risk that is seemingly being ignored in the whole national pride rhetoric.

Like it or not, referendums are here to stay, but these symbolic ones seem to be overshadowing the ones that might actually affect people's everyday lives — such as one about the minimum wage.

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