

## Letting the public choose a candidate

Written by Taipei Times Editorial  
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The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) on Wednesday announced that it would put off its presidential primary until May 22, saying that it had been unable to mediate between President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and former premier William Lai (賴清德).

The delay comes despite Lai saying that he has no interest in becoming Tsai's running mate, but prefers the primary process to democratically decide the nominee for next year's presidential election.

Delaying the primary and pushing to strengthen Tsai's position questions how committed her supporters are to party unity. Several key DPP figures have said that protecting Taiwan's democracy and sovereignty, and blocking China from annexing Taiwan rely on a strongly united party capable of regaining voter confidence.

A Taiwanese Public Opinion Foundation poll released on March 25 found that 55.1 percent of respondents supported Lai, while 26 percent supported Tsai. With a sampling of 1,073 adults, perhaps the poll's numbers are not representative of the population, but the party should determine as soon as possible who would truly be its strongest candidate.

Transfers of power between the DPP and the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), as well as the outcome of the nine-in-one elections on Nov. 24 last year, shows that voters are often not loyal to a particular party. The worry for some is that if Tsai is nominated, Lai supporters might vote for an independent candidate or abstain, rather than vote for Tsai.

The postponement of the primary prompted long-time DPP member Michael Tsai (蔡啟芳) to renounce his membership, citing Tsai Ing-wen's failure to promote "Taiwanese nationalism," seek UN participation or employ partial conscription — advice he claims to have given her since she took office in 2016.

Tsai Ing-wen's ineffectual implementation of transitional justice and judicial reform have resulted in "alienation and anxiety" among Taiwanese, he added.

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The standoff over the primary has forced Premier Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌) to try to put out fires to limit the extent of a party split. On Saturday, he urged DPP members to remember the hardships that were overcome to allow an indigenous party to emerge.

However, if the party cannot determine its strongest candidate and generate support for that nominee, there is little that Su or anyone else could do to keep it from failing at the polls.

Su knows this, but on Saturday, when he said the delay would allow the party to see who will be the KMT's candidate before selecting its own, he seemed to get distracted from the real issue, especially as the KMT has announced its own delay.

Each party clearly hopes to see the other's cards before playing its hand, but the DPP does not need to get hung up on what the KMT will do.

The KMT has already given it some wonderful gifts: the talk about signing a peace treaty with China and Kaohsiung Mayor Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜) allegedly making sneaky deals during his trip to Hong Kong, Macau and southern China last month.

The DPP only needs to rally behind its strongest candidate, target the KMT's China-centric plans and assure voters that it will not allow the nation to become a special administrative region of human-rights-violating China.

If party's primary indicates that the public wants Tsai Ing-wen to stay in office, that is fine: nominate her. If it shows that the public prefers Lai to run, the DPP will gain nothing by insisting on putting Tsai Ing-wen on the ballot.

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