

Ex-KMT legislator Diane Lee receives two-year sentence

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Taipei District Court judges yesterday found former Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) legislator Diane Lee (李麗芬) guilty of fraud and forgery over her possession of dual citizenship and sentenced her to two years in prison.

Lee was convicted of four counts of fraud in connection to her US citizenship. An original four-year sentence was commuted to two years.

Public officials are not allowed to hold dual citizenship. Lee has claimed she mistakenly believed that her US citizenship would automatically become invalid upon taking up a public position.

The judges dismissed the explanation, saying that if Lee had been unclear on the rules, she would not have called on former Taipei deputy mayor Chen Shih-meng (陳希銘) to step down in 1994 when she questioned his status on the same issue.

Lee did not appear in court to hear the judgment, but issued a statement declaring her innocence and saying the salary she earned during her terms as legislator and Taipei City councilor were not illegal. Lee said she would appeal.

In January last year, the Taipei District Prosecutors' Office received confirmation from the US State Department that Lee's US citizenship remained valid.

Prosecutors said that on personnel forms she filled out as a Taipei City councilor in 1994 and during her three terms as a lawmaker starting in 1998, Lee deliberately left blank the field asking whether she held citizenship from any country other than the Republic of China.

Prosecutors say that the more than NT\$100 million (US\$3 million) in income Lee earned during her terms as councilor and lawmaker were gained illegally.

Deputy Minister of the Interior Chien Tai-lang (陳泰良) yesterday said investigating the salary that Lee received as a city councilor was a matter for the Taipei City Council and the ministry. The criminal court proceedings against Lee are separate from any civil action concerning her salary.

Legislative Yuan Secretary-General Lin Hsi-shan (林錫山) said Lee was entitled to appeal and therefore the legislature shouldn't take action on her salary as a legislator before a final judgment. Once it is final, they may pursue the matter, Lin said.

Lee resigned from the KMT in December 2008 and gave up her legislative seat last year.

Asked for comment yesterday, KMT caucus chief deputy secretary-general Lin Tsang-min (林錫山) said Lee had shown some "negligence" during her time serving the public.

Lin said Lee should accept the ruling and the judgment should serve as a warning to all government officials reminding them to respect the law.

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The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) said the judgment showed that the KMT had been lying for Lee all along.

“I don’t want to kick a horse when it’s down, but the judgment shows that the DPP was right in accusing Lee of having dual citizenship. The KMT is obliged to apologize and explain why it helped Lee conceal the truth,” DPP Legislator Pan Meng-an (潘孟安) said.

DPP Legislator Chen Ting-fei (陳亭斐) called the judgment “delayed justice” and said the KMT should apologize for dragging out the case.

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