

NPP suggests plebiscite about territory

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Members of the 908 Taiwan Republic Campaign hold placards that read “Break the bird cage; launch a referendum on redrafting the Constitution” at a news conference in front of the Presidential Office Building in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: CNA

The New Power Party (NPP) yesterday put forward six referendum topics regarding sovereignty and labor rights, including sensitive proposals dealing with the nation’s territory and official name, and said it would conduct an online poll to decide which two of the six topics the party should advocate to propose for a referendum.

Four of the topics fall within the category of sovereignty: whether the president should convene a “citizens’ constitutional convention” to draft a new constitution, which would need to be approved by referendum; whether Taiwan should seek to compete in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics under the name “Taiwan”; whether the government should define the country’s territory as “Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, Matsu and other islets”; and whether the English name “Republic of China” should be removed from Taiwanese passports.

In the labor rights category, the party proposed two questions: whether the Legislative Yuan should pass a “national holiday act” to ensure a minimum of 19 national holidays each year for public and private employees and whether it should pass a “minimum wage act” that guarantees the minimum income needed to sustain the basic living needs of employees and their families.

The NPP invited the public to vote on the six proposals on its Web site from yesterday to Thursday, saying it would initiate the referendum process for the most favored topic in each of the two categories and expects to submit the two referendum proposals to the Central Election Commission next month at the earliest.

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The NPP's proposals followed the passage of an amendment to the Referendum Act (公投法) that lowers the thresholds for initiating, seconding and passing referendums.

"[The proposal] to establish a 'citizens' constitutional convention' is in line with the essence of Sunflower movement, which called for a convention to draft a constitution appropriate to Taiwan through a bottom-up decisionmaking process," NPP Executive Chairman Huang Kuo-chang (黃國昌) said

Redefining the nation's territory is crucial to help Taiwan assert its sovereignty and would have a positive effect on policymaking and budgeting, Huang said.

The NPP's proposals have been criticized as being in conflict with the amendment, which rules out territorial changes and constitutional amendments as viable referendum topics.

Huang said that even though the party would touch on the issue of the nation's territory and official name, none of the issues would require any changes to the Constitution.

The Democratic Progressive Party described the act as a procedural bill regulating how referendum processes should be carried out, not what topics the public can vote on, Huang said, adding that the NPP believes the public has the right to vote on the six topics.

"How could a purely procedural bill deprive citizens of the power to vote on those issues?" NPP Legislator Hsu Yung-ming (許毓雄) said, calling on the commission to uphold the values of democracy when the NPP initiates the referendum processes.

While same-sex marriage opponents have reportedly planned to launch a referendum on the issue, Huang said that basic human rights cannot be put to vote and a referendum could not override the constitutional interpretation in May that found the statutory ban on same-sex marriage to be unconstitutional, Huang said.

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