

Chinese lobbying outshines Taiwan

Written by Taipei Times

Monday, 11 January 2010 07:46 -

The Washington Post printed a front-page story on Saturday saying that China had launched a multimillion-dollar lobbying effort “so effective that it is challenging the heralded efforts of nemesis Taiwan.”

According to the story, China has dramatically improved its image in the US and now has enough friends in Congress to blunt at least some pro-Taiwan legislation.

“From 2005 to 2009, China for the first time hosted more US politicians and congressional staff members than Taiwan,” the story said. “China has also tripled the amount it spends on lobbying firms, including such powerhouses as Patton Boggs and Hogan & Hartson, since 2006 — although it continues to be outspent by Taiwan.”

Headed “As China Raises, So Does Its Influence On The Hill,” the report vividly contrasts the way Congress attacked China Ocean Shipping Co 10 years ago as being a front for espionage with the way leading senators and congressmen praised the company last year for employing thousands of Americans and helping to keep the waters of Alaska clean.

“The congressional about-face illustrates a dramatic increase in China’s influence on Capitol Hill, where for years its lobbying muscle never matched its ballooning importance in world affairs,” the Post said.

The newspaper said that China’s new prominence was largely the result of Beijing’s increasingly sophisticated efforts to influence events in Washington and a “growing realization among US lawmakers that China has become a critical economic player across America.”

Many Americans still view China with deep suspicion because of its communist system and human rights record, the newspaper said, but the results of Beijing’s campaign are changing that.

While there can be no doubt that China has greatly increased its power within the US Congress over the last few years, the Taiwan lobby remains strong and there are still many congressmen and -senators who can be relied upon to support Taipei on crucial issues.

California Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein, a former mayor of San Francisco, is quoted by the Post as saying: “There was originally this kind of anti-communist view of China. That’s changing. China is a socialist country, but one that is increasingly becoming capitalistic.”

“The new openness toward China is often subtle and not shared by all. But an undeniable evolution is taking place, congressional staffers and analysts said, as members of Congress, many with increasing numbers of large and small businesses in their districts that depend on trade with China, are now far more likely to kill or water down measures opposed to Beijing,” the newspaper added. “In the mid-1990s, Taiwan’s success in lobbying for a visa for

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then--president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) to attend a reunion at Cornell University and give a speech infuriated China and helped precipitate a crisis in the Taiwan Strait.”

In 2005, China spent US\$4 million lobbying Congress to let the state-owned China National Offshore Oil Corp buy the US oil conglomerate UNOCAL, and failed.

Since then, China has opened a US\$200 million embassy in Washington with 10 full-time diplomats — most of them speaking perfect English — working on congressional affairs.

“Some legislators who used to be considered firmly in Taiwan’s camp now lean toward China,” the Post said.

It points out that Eni Faleomavaega, a non-voting 11-term member from American Samoa who is chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, was once friendly to Taipei but over the last year has “watered down or killed pro-Taiwan legislation and resolutions.”

“Faleomavaega partly credited China’s improved lobbying for the shift,” the Post said.

It quoted him as saying: “Our friendliest allies — Germany, Great Britain, France and Japan — know how to work the system. China is just trying to catch up.”

Commenting on the report, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) caucus deputy secretary-general Huang Wei-cher (黃偉哲) said the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) administration should take heed of Beijing’s efforts.

“The administration under President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) is still trumpeting the diplomatic truce policy, while clearly our enemy is not resting at all,” Huang said.

Huang urged the Ma government to review the policy and enhance Taiwan’s lobbying of members of the US Congress, adding that “the result of the [Saturday legislative] by-elections [in Taitung, Taoyuan and Taichung] showed the public’s dissatisfaction with Ma’s policy, including the diplomatic truce policy.”

KMT caucus secretary-general Lu Hsueh-chang (呂秀蓮), meanwhile, described the change as “natural,” given the extent to which trade has grown between China and the US.

However, Lu said the Ma government should still be alerted to the change because “the US is a very important ally of ours.”

Lu said members of the legislature would continue to enhance communication with their counterparts in the US via the Taiwan-US Parliamentary Amity Association.

Source: [Taipei Times 2010/01/11](#)