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Special inquiries broaden NPC supervision channels

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On November 4, 2010, President Heng Samrin of Cambodian National Assembly chairs a ceremony to welcome visiting Chinese top legislator Wu Bangguo, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, in Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia. After the ceremony, the two held a meeting. *Liu Weibing*

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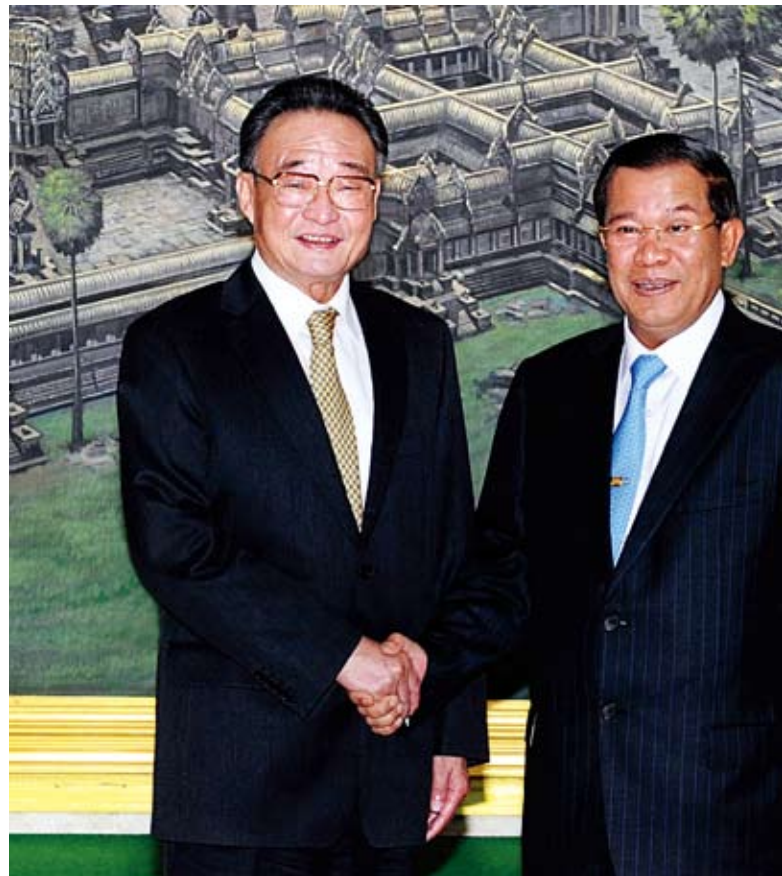
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'I love and respect China'
-In memory of US Senator and President Pro Tempore Ted Stevens



NPC Standing Committee Chairman Wu Bangguo meets with Cambodian Senate President Chea Sim. *Liu Weibing*



NPC Standing Committee Chairman Wu Bangguo meets with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen. *Liu Weibing*

Boosting friendship with neighbors for regional prosperity

–Review on top legislator’s visit to ASEAN countries

By Xiong Zhengyan, Wei Jianhua and Wang Li



Wu Bangguo, chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, meets with the speaker of the House of Representatives of Indonesia Marzuki Ali in Jakarta, capital of Indonesia, on November 8, 2010. *Liu Weibing*

The top legislator's visit to the three ASEAN countries, aiming to promote China's friendly bilateral ties with its neighbors and deepen cooperation, achieved fruitful results that would boost regional development and peace.

Politburo Standing Committee Member of CPC Central Committee and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress Wu Bangguo paid official goodwill visits to Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand from November 3 to November 13, 2010. The three nations, all members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), have long-standing friendly ties with China. It is of great importance for China, who tries to maintain friendly ties with its neighbors and secure the strategic opportunity that is crucial for its growth, to consolidate and strengthen bilateral ties with ASEAN member countries, the three nations named above included, when the global political landscape undergoes fundamental and complicated changes. The top legislator's visit to the three ASEAN countries, aiming to promote China's friendly bilateral ties with its neighbors and deepen cooperation, achieved fruitful results that would boost regional development and peace.



Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono meets with visiting Chinese top legislator Wu Bangguo on November 10, 2010. *Liu Weibing*



NPC Standing Committee Chairman Wu Bangguo meets with President of the National Assembly of Thailand Chai Chidchob, who is also the speaker of the House of Representatives. *Liu Weibing*

Infusing new life into long-standing ties

The friendship between China and Cambodia has a long history and people in the two countries harbor good will towards one another, just like two brothers. An atmosphere of welcome dominated Cambodia during the top legislator's visit to the country right after he arrived in Phnom Penh. Every corner along the top legislator's itinerary route from the airport to the town, the hotel and local government agencies was decked out with the national flags of China and Cambodia and welcome banners. The two countries' leaders reviewed friendship between China and Cambodia and hoped for a brighter future concerning cooperation. Wu said that it is an undeviating policy of China to deepen and broaden the all-round cooperative partnership with Cambodia. Cambodian leaders reiterated the nation's commitment to One-China policy and it has full respect of China's integrity of sovereignty and territory, adding that it will allow no forces to use its territory to impair China's integrity of sovereignty

and territory.

The year of 2010 marked the 60th anniversary of China-Indonesia diplomatic ties and also "The Year of Indonesia-China Friendship", which added extra significance to the top legislator's visit to Indonesia. Indonesia, the largest economy with the largest population and territory among ASEAN member countries, occupied a very important position on China's diplomatic agenda. Wu stressed on multiple occasions during his visit that China attaches strategic importance to ties between the two countries and would take the 60th anniversary as an opportunity to advance the all-round growth of relations. Indonesia government officials said that it is a long-standing and undeviating policy of Indonesia to maintain strategic partnership with China, adding that Indonesia will work with China to escalate the partnership between the two countries to new heights.

China and Thailand are kith and kin. The top legislator's visit to Thailand infused new life into the bilateral ties between the two countries. Thai government officials said that it is the shared aspiration of Thai royal family, government, parliament



NPC Standing Committee Chairman Wu Bangguo arrives in Bangkok, capital of Thailand. *Li Tao*

The emphasis on boosting China's business ties with the three countries dominated the top legislator's meetings with his counterparts during his visit.

and people to seek closer bonds with China. Thai officials added that Thai people harbor the greatest compassion towards Chinese people, which can be measured by one of many facts that Thailand-China friendship panel is the biggest-staffed one among the parliament of Thailand's more than 50 committees and panels designated to promote bilateral ties with foreign countries.

It was high on the top legislator's agenda to promote China's ties with ASEAN during his visit. Wu reiterated during his visit that China will adhere to its long-standing diplomatic policy and cultivate friendship and partnership with its neighbors, which is in line with its self growth. Wu said that China welcomes a more stable ASEAN, adding that China supports ASEAN's integration and expects ASEAN to play a greater role in regional cooperation. The three member countries' leaders thought high of China's diplomatic policy and agreed that China's development and prosperity helped bring out the vigor and vitality of regional economy, adding that their countries will make efforts to boost strategic ties between ASEAN and China.

Promising future for cooperation

Friendly political relations will surely facilitate international business ties, which in turn will provide everlasting impetus for more stable bilateral ties. The emphasis on boosting China's business ties with the three countries dominated the top legislator's meetings with his counterparts during his visit.

The top legislator spent a lot of time elaborating on the potential for international economic cooperation during every leg of his visit, exploring new frontiers and methods for further cooperation. Wu said that the Chinese economy is highly complementary to the three countries' economies, which indicates great potential and a promising future for more bilateral cooperation. He added that the free trade agreement between China and the ASEAN, which took effect at the start of the year of 2010, offers new opportunities to escalate bilateral cooperation to new heights. Wu said that China's efforts to transform its growth pattern provide new impetus for the economic recovery in Asia. The three countries also launched new economic plans highlighting infrastructure construction,



NPC Standing Committee Chairman Wu Bangguo meets with Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva. *Liu Weibing*



NPC Standing Committee Chairman Wu Bangguo meets with the prefectural magistrate of Chiangmai, who is also a prince, in Thailand. *Li Tao*

agriculture, new and high technology and industry upgrade, aspects in which China is experienced thanks to its implementation of opening-up policy over the past three decades. He said that he hoped that China and the ASEAN countries will take the opportunity and work together to translate the political trust and the great business potential to fruitful results and regional prosperity. Wu added that China encourages Chinese enterprises to participate in the three countries' infrastructure construction and other programs, adding that China is prepared to fund the cooperation programs. He said that he hoped enterprises, both in China and in the three countries, will take the leading role and explore new methods for better cooperation.

The top legislator offered feasible proposals concerning business cooperation that tailored the three countries' conditions. He noted that China-Cambodia economic cooperation should give priority to agriculture with more efforts to help Cambodia increase agriculture output. He suggested that Chinese and Indonesian governments sign agreements on cooperation concerning infrastructure construction, which could inte-

grate China's experience into Indonesia's stimulus plans for a win-win situation. He stressed that China and Thailand sign a five-year plan to boost mutual investment and outline business cooperation between the two countries with emphasis on programs concerning high technology and new energy.

The three countries' leaders gave a positive response to the top legislator's proposals, noting that China's growth infuses new life and energy into the regional development. They said that their countries will work with China to escalate bilateral business ties to new heights and open new frontiers for further cooperation, adding that their countries will create a favorable climate for investment and more Chinese enterprises are welcome to take part in their infrastructure construction projects and start businesses in their countries.

During the top legislator's visit, China and the three countries signed as many as 33 cooperation programs, which involved a total of \$15 billion and a wide range of projects concerning infrastructure construction, energy, communication technology, rail transportation, machinery, finance, grid and agriculture sector.



People in China and the three countries harbor a long-standing good will towards one another due to the geographic proximity and the cultural bonds.

Parliamentary exchange plays unique role

It was one of the top legislator's major concerns to escalate the exchange between the National People's Congress and the three countries' legislatures to new heights. Wu lectured on China's people's congress system and the country's progress in legislation and democracy. He said that China, not different from the three countries, also has the responsibilities to boost economic growth, improve public well-beings, reinforce ethnic unity, maintain social order and improve legislation though it adopts the people's congress system, which is different from the three countries' political systems. The National People's Congress is willing to improve ties with the countries' legislatures and work together to infuse life and new impetus to enhance the ties between China and the countries as well as China-ASEAN relations.

Leaders of the three countries' legislatures all agreed with Wu's views, noting that it is the shared aspiration of parties

within legislature in their countries to maintain high-level exchange with China's National People's Congress and pledged more efforts to improve the exchange between commissions, committees and offices designated to promote the bilateral ties so that the two sides could learn from each other as well as boost cooperation in different aspects and improve coordination in regional and international legislature organizations.

People in China and the three countries harbor a long-standing good will towards one another due to the geographic proximity and the cultural bonds. Chinese people and people in ASEAN countries supported one another when natural disasters including the Indonesia tsunami and the May 12 Wenchuan earthquake struck. Indonesia and Thailand reported heavy death toll and casualties and property loss after a string of recent catastrophes including earthquake, tsunami and volcano eruption hit Indonesia and floods inundated parts of Thailand. The top legislator's visit to Indonesia and Thailand signaled Chinese people's deep sympathy and condolence to the two countries. He said that Chinese people took the side with Indonesia and Thai people and would spare no efforts to help with the two countries' disaster relief operations and post-disaster reconstruction programs, adding that he believed that Indonesia and Thai people would brave the challenges. The two countries' leaders thanked Chinese government and people for the generous support and aid. Local people in disaster-stricken areas in the two countries said that Chinese people are always there ready to offer a helping hand when disasters struck, noting that a friend in need is a friend indeed and that they were really inspired.

Southeast Asia countries host a large population of overseas Chinese. The top legislator was very concerned about the well-being of the overseas Chinese and added meetings with representatives of local overseas Chinese communities to his itinerary for his visit to the three countries. Wu said that overseas Chinese have made great contribution to host countries' economic prosperity and social progress, China's modernization and peaceful unification, and the friendship and partnership between China and their host countries, which the Chinese government and people will never forget. The local overseas Chinese applauded the top legislator's speech, vowing to follow the traditions of their predecessors and keep working for the prosperity of their host countries and China.

Government leaders and people from all walks of life in the three countries lauded the top legislator's visit, noting that it exemplified not only Chinese people's compassion towards people in ASEAN countries, but also China's commitment to peaceful development, which could be measured by agreements on cooperation signed during the visit. They said that they felt so privileged to have such a good neighbor, partner and brother. ■

Special inquiries broaden NPC supervision channels

By NPC staff reporters Yu Hao, Li Xiaojian, Wang Ping, Liang Guodong, Zhang Weiwei and Xie Sufang

It is 8 am on December 24, 2010 in the Golden Hall of the Great Hall of the People. At the photography area opposite to the rostrum, photographers are busy adjusting their cameras. Website reporters from NPC, People.com, Xinhua News Agency, China Internet, China News Service, Legal Daily, Guangming Daily and China Economic Information Net are talking to each other in low voice. A CCTV live broadcast is ready too.

From the discussion of the reporters, we know that this joint conference is the second time over the past 10 years. The first was the joint conference on the amendment of Marriage Law held by the 9th NPC Standing Committee.

This is the scene of the special inquiry into further reform on medical system on the 18th Session of the 11th NPC Standing Committee.





A clinic staff (first from right) from Fuqiang village, Tancheng county in Shandong Province explains to the local villagers the function of the new rural cooperative medical care system. Xinhua

Responses to key problems

At 9 am, the 18th joint session of the 11th NPC Standing Committee opens formally, as a special inquiry into the work of the State Council on medical care reform. The conference is attended by Vice Chairmen of the NPC Standing Committee, including Uyunqing, Han Qide, Hua Jianmin, Chen Zhili, Zhou Tienong, Li Jianguo, Ismail Tiliwaldi, Jiang Shusheng, Yang Junqi and Sang Guowei. The members of NPC special commissions, representatives from each province and autonomous region, municipality are also in attendance. Entrusted by the State Council, the principals of the ministries of development and reform, finance, human resources, social security and public health attend the meeting to listen to advice and answer the inquiry.

“The subject of this joint session is the major issues in the medical system reform, especially those of great interest to the people. Short and brief questions and replies are welcome,” said the host Li Jianguo, who is the vice chairman and secretary-general of the NPC Standing Committee.

“For ordinary people, it is a mission impossible to see a doctor in a double A hospital or above. To make an appointment with senior doctors, they have to line up all night long, or ask relatives and friends for assistance. Such a situation has already caused the great discontentment among the public. Time is urgent to speed up medical reform in order to address these problems effectively. How to promote the reform of public hospitals and what are the measures? Will the present problems be solved?” Deputy Ren Maodong asks the first question. He is also the vice chairman of the Commission of Education, Science, Culture and Health. Ren’s inquiry has reflected the common feeling among ordinary people.

Minister of Health Chen Zhu replied that the leadership mechanism and work process have been established. Chen’s ministry has hammered out schemes, policies and measures to reform public hospitals. Some pilot projects and supportive regulations are put into effect. To solve the medical care problems, tremendous efforts have been made in two aspects: A systematic reform is a fundamental way out; Promotion of concrete measures to facilitate the interest of the public.

“For the problem mentioned above, I feel the same. Not long ago, the grandson of a friend got a fever. The grandpa took his grandson to the children’s hospital. But there was no doctor’s

A total of 10 deputies asked questions concerning the basic medical security system, essential medicine system, public hospitals’ reform, community medical service and medical care in the countryside.

registration available. It spent him 1,200 yuan as the registration fees to see two senior doctors. One day’s cost in the hospital surpassed 10,000 yuan. This is a true story happened to one former senior official, needless to say the ordinary people,” asked another member of the NPC Standing Committee, Cheng Jinpei, who is also vice chairman of the Commission of Education, Science, Culture and Health. “What would be the solutions and working objectives to resolve such problems?”

“To cut down the high medical cost, we need to accelerate medical reform. The profit-seeking trend in some public hospitals must be terminated, that means unnecessary treatment, examinations and prescriptions must be stopped,” noted Zhang Mao, vice-minister of health.

Medical care reform is a worldwide issue. Zhang said, “We aim to slash at least 30 percent of the cost the 12th Five-Year Plan period (2011-15). Besides, it is a sum total. Everyone of us will be reduced medical care burden at that time.”



Members of the NPC Standing Committee raise questions during a special inquiry meeting. Ren Chenming

The inquiry concluded at 11:30 am. A total of 10 deputies asked questions concerning the basic medical security system, essential medicine system, public hospitals' reform, community medical service and medical care in the countryside. Times passed too rapidly to cover all questions raised by the committee members.

Supervision and support

Deputies' questions are critical and sincere; Answers from the relevant departments are also likewise frank, without shaking off their responsibilities in face of the conflicts in medical reform. When the host announced the adjournment of the special inquiry, participants attending the event shook hands and chat warmly.

"I feel very glad, for all ministries and commissions pay much attention to this special inquiry. It is also a good opportunity for us to communicate with each other; we can report the progress of medical reform and its next target to the NPC Standing Committee," said Health Minister Chen Zhu. He also noted that the questions from committee members are well-prepared and of primary significance, such as the reform of public hospitals, the community-level medical service, promotion of essential medicine system, which are all fundamental to the medical system reform and major concern to the public.

Chen said that this inquiry made him experience the support, which is realized by NPC's effective supervision and promotion towards the government work to medical reform.

"We will turn the pressure into motives and make great efforts to solve the problems pointed out by the deputies, to give benefits to the ordinary people by deepening the medical reform."

Chen said that this inquiry was not only attended by officials from Ministry of Health, but also leaders from related departments, making it a good opportunity of communication. "A lot of problems in the medical system cannot be solved by the Ministry of Health only. The medical reform is a comprehensive result of each department," Chen said. "The reform should be pushed in many aspects, such as infrastructure construction, human resources development and compensation mechanism, which guarantee the public benefits and the enthusiasm of medical staff at the same time. In these aspects, the support from departments such as the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Finance is crucial."

"By and large, I am satisfied with answers of the government departments," Professor Zheng said, adding "there are some aspects failing to meet the demand. It is because that we have our own thinking, which is different from the way the government thinks and acts. Thus, there is no complete satisfaction can be



Major department officials from the State Council pick up questions raised by the NPC Standing Committee members. *Ren Chenming*



On December 24, 2010, the 18th session of the 11th NPC Standing Committee organizes a special inquiry on the development of medical care reform. Officials from the State Council attended the event and answered questions. *Ma Zengke*

guaranteed, but at least 80 percent has been reached.”

Zheng thought highly of addressing special inquiries. “First, the legislature can communicate with the administrative organs in a face-to-face way. Second, it can evoke great attention of government, especially among the ministerial level officials who are decision makers in these departments. So their reply is not merely directing to the NPC deputies, but can give the public an explicit answer too. Third, it is crucial for the legislative body to grasp new information when discussing State affairs. As a fact, all our investigations are based on past practice; we hope to understand what the government will do in the future.” He believes that it will enable a better coordination between the legislature and government departments.

“This (the inquiry) is different from group review, in which

This inquiry on medical reform is the first one organized in the form of joint sessions of the NPC Standing Committee since its 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee.

government representatives only listen to the discussions by the deputies,” Zheng noted. A face-to-face exchange can bring the two sides close, creating an opportunity for the public to understand what the top legislature concerns and what the government plans to do.

Deputy Chen Sixi, one expert on the Constitution and administrative laws, echoed, “The successful holding of the inquiry proves that NPC deputies have done sufficient homework in advance because their questions are to-the-point. As for the ministerial officials, they have given well-prepared answers.”

According to Chen, this inquiry on medical reform is the first one organized in the form of joint sessions of the NPC Standing Committee since its 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee. So it is of great significance. First, compared to work reports of the NPC Standing Committee, special inquiries help enhance the understanding among NPC Standing Commit-

tee members toward relevant departments. In this way, deputies right of knowing has been enlarged. Second, questions raised by NPC Standing Committee members represent the interest of the public. It will help relevant departments to clarify their future reform plans. Third, through the question and answer mechanism, the understanding between NPC deputies and relevant departments could be deepened. Fourth, special inquiries have expanded and enriched the supervision channels of the NPC in a more effective way.

More inquiries anticipated

“This special inquiry impressed me very much. In the whole process, everybody shows great care to the medical reform at community level or in the countryside. A number of problems exist during the health care reform in the countryside. Answers from the ministries and commissions are down to earth. After the exchange of opinions, I feel more confident about the medical care reform,” said Guo Fenglian, a grassroots committee member of the NPC Standing Committee. She is quite concerned about the medical care reform in rural area.

“The NPC Standing Committee has organized three inquiries in 2010, I participated two. It proves an effective way to supervise the work of the Central Government, the Supreme People’s Court and the Supreme People’s Procuratorate,” said Guo. She noted the event helps her to get to know how the government is implementing the policies made by the CPC Central Committee.

Guo said she hopes future inquiries could be enlarged to the work of the Supreme People’s Court and the Supreme People’s Procuratorate.

Chen Xiaochuan, deputy chairman of Standing Committee of the Guangdong Provincial People’s Congress, attended the inquiry. He said such a mechanism helps strengthen the communications between NPC and relevant governmental departments. On the other hand, it will help the NPC, the top legislature in China, better supervise the work of government officials.

“Special inquiry is an innovation to the supervision work of the NPC, which was rarely used in the past,” said Mao Lei, a senior reporter with People’s Daily. Mao covered all the three inquiries in 2010. According to him, since the first special inquiry, this kind of supervision has been welcomed and adopted by local people’s congresses at all levels. The people’s congresses are all carrying on their supervision in this form now. The topics of special inquiries selected by the NPC Standing Committee ranging from final accounting, grain security to medical reform are all closely related to the interests of ordinary people. It reflects the responsibilities of the NPC towards the people.

“I think that inquiries should be carried out more frequently in the future as a regular practice by touching upon people’s livelihood-related issues in the work of Supreme People’s Procuratorate and Supreme People’s Court. Besides, topics of inquiry should also be the focus of social development, such as price hiking, inflation and counter-measures of the government,” said Mao, who is full of expectation to future special inquiries. ■



Website media conduct live broadcast of the inquiry. Ma Zengke

Inquiries and interrogations turn a new chapter in NPC's supervision work

By Yu Hao

"**T**his year, we will select some widely concerned issues and hear reports on those issues from related State Council departments. Main leaders from those departments will be required to listen to suggestions and respond to inquiries and interrogations," Wu Bangguo, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), said on the third session of 11th NPC during his work report, which activated NPC'S supervision power that has not been fully understood for years.

In 2010, the Standing Committee of the NPC fulfilled its promise to start inquiry system, conducting three inquiries on different topics. It is an important move to promote democracy and legal construction, it is also a useful trial to improve supervision work and enhance the work efficiency.



Wang Yunlong, member of the NPC Standing Committee.



Xie Xuren, minister of finance.



Cheng Jinpei, member of the NPC Standing Committee.



Zhang Mao, vice-minister of health.

Inquiries make progress in innovations

The power of supervision of the NPC is endowed by the Constitution and laws and inquiry is the legal means for the NPC to exercise the supervision right. Inquiry on special topics is more well-planned and organized, with intensified rigidity and constraint force.

While how to make the supervision means varied? As we all know, with strong political, legal and procedural nature, NPC's supervision work must be strictly implemented abiding by the Constitution and laws. While it doesn't mean supervision work should follow the routine and exclude innovation, it requires NPC to make innovative explorations and attempts under the law.

Based on that, when the Standing Committee of the NPC discussed the 2009 Final Central Government Report on June 24, 2010, it conducted special topic inquiries in six group meetings for the first time, where leaders from the Ministry of Finance arrived for responding.

On August 27, the Standing Committee of the NPC firstly held two joint meeting to discuss the Report on National Food Security and conduct inquiries into this sector. Main leaders from the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Land Resources, Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Agriculture, the People's Bank of China, China Banking Regulatory Commission, China Insurance Regulatory Commission, the National Food Authority arrived to hear the suggestions and respond to inquiries and interrogations. Lu Yongxiang, Han Qide, Chen Zhili, Li Jianguo, Ismail Tiliwaldi, Jiang Shusheng, Chen Changzhi, Yan Junqi, Sang Guowei, the vice chairpersons of the Standing Committee, presented at the joint meetings.

On December 24, the Standing Committee of the NPC con-



Staffs from different departments of the No. 3 Hospital Affiliated with the Liaoning Medical University in Liaoning Province hold a group consultation at the digital image center. Gu Jin

The power of supervision of the NPC is endowed by the Constitution and laws and inquiry is the legal means for the NPC to exercise the supervision right.

ducted inquiries and interrogations into the report of the State Council on deepening the reform of health system, with the form of multi-group meetings for the first time. Several main leaders from five departments, such as Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, Ministry of Health, arrived at the meeting for responding. Uyunqing, Han Qide, Hua Jianmin, Chen Zhili, Zhou Tienong, Li Jianguo, Ismail Tiliwaldi, Jiang Shusheng, Yan Junqi, Sang Guowei, the vice chairpersons of the Standing Committee presented at the meetings.

Through the three practices, the Standing Committee accumulated experiences on the special topic inquiries, and diversified the limited supervision means.

Interactive form of "Q&A" reflects an innovative attempt to strengthen supervision force and amplify supervision effects.

Concerns on people's livelihood demonstrated in practice

Inquirers should be good at asking questions and upholding the statutory powers and duties, but avoid exceeding their power. For the persons questioned, since answering the inquiries brings them pressure but also driving force, they should



Shop assistant at a drugstore writes down the names of medicine in Qionghai, Hainan Province. CFP

actively respond to the hot topics without evading difficulties, so as to get recognition and support.

"It is much more difficult to see a doctor in major hospitals. In order to see a specialist, ordinary patients have to spend a whole night to queue in the hospitals, or turn to relatives or relations for help, which has inflamed passions in the society," said Ren Maodong, a member of the Standing Committee of the NPC.

"A few days ago, a grandson of my friend who once served as a provincial-level official was sent to the hospital due to high fever. They saw two doctors, one of whom charged them 1,200 yuan... They spent nearly 10,000 yuan on that day," Cheng Jinpei said in the meeting.

"It is hard for officials to see a doctor, let alone the ordinary people," he added.

During the three inquiries on special topics related with the health system reform or food security, the NPC, special committees and deputies of the NPC played their respective advantages, all putting the focus on the problems the public are most concerned.

Questions should be asked to the point and the answers should be concrete. Chen Sixi, a member of the NPC Standing Committee believed that related departments should be well prepared for questions and actively respond to the inquiries. Officials should actively deal with the inquires from members

of the NPC Standing Committee and strive to tackle the problems which couldn't be solved temporarily.

Inquiries should be focus in major issues and livelihood problems, and answers should be prepared with emphasis. Although the inquiries has different angles and divisions, the aim is to solve the problems in people's lives. Wu Bangguo has emphasized several times that the committee should learn lessons from the inquires on special topics, so as to improve the next inquiry work plan which emphasizes the widely concerned issues.

NPC's supervision turns more transparent

"Live broadcasts and reports of the inquiries and interrogations indicate NPC's resolution to further promote the transparency of NPC's work, and accept the public's supervision.

"It show that the Standing Committee will pay more attention to livelihood problems and focus on promoting the resolution of problems closely related with people's interests," said Li lianning, member of the Standing Committee of the NPC.

As the developments of democratic politics and improvements of congress system, the NPC has played more and more important role in the society, attracting higher expectations from the public. Therefore, NPC's work should be more open and transparent, which is well represented by the media reports of the inquiries on special topics.

The People's Daily, the Xinhua News Agency, CCTV and the journal of National People's Congress made on-site coverage for the first special topic inquiry. In the second one, besides normal reports,

Oriental Horizon of CCTV made news talk show, the NPC's official website and some influential media produced special website pages. The live broadcasts by radio and television were adopted in the third inquiry.

Open and transparent politics is essential for the Standing Committee to accept deputies and people's supervision, but also help promote the progress of related work. No matter the inquiries or the answers are both conducted in public, which ensures the supervision effects and pushes progress of democracy and the rule of law in China.

As a Chinese saying goes, small steps make thousands of miles, small streams add up to huge rivers and seas. The inquiries and interrogations on special topics have got more practical and lively via one after one exploration and innovation. ■

NPC's work should be more open and transparent, which is well represented by the media reports of the inquiries on special topics.

Two years of medical reform scores high

By Li Xiaojian



Traditional Chinese medicine sold at a Tongrentang drugstore in Beijing. CFP

“In my rural hometown, sick people above 60 used to be afraid of going to hospital. With a medical insurance card, they now visit hospitals or clinics whenever they will, because medicines are cheaper, and they enjoy co-pay when hospitalized,” said Lü Xiping, a middle school teacher from Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region on December 22. From what she observed, the medical service has significantly improved for ordinary people in the past two years. The reform in medical care has been easing off the difficulty to see a doctor and excessive expenses.

“Since the medical care reform was initiated, changes have

taken place with the advance of reform in key fronts,” said Zhang Ping, director of the National Development and Reform Commission, in his report to the Standing Committee of the 11th National People’s Congress on December 22 last year.

In the following discussion, members of the committee and other representatives pointed out that the reform in medical systems is closely related to the health and welfare of millions of people, and even though there were obstacles on the way, the reform had provided tangible benefits to the mass.

“As a grass-roots representative, I know that cheaper medical care is another hope of the people after schools became free, and farming was exempt from taxes. The medical insurance has been covering more people, the standard improving, and the medicines getting cheaper. The reform has accomplished a lot.”

Basic medical care covering 90 percent

Lü Xiping changed her idea about medical services in rural areas only after the new rural cooperative medical scheme was carried out two years ago.

“With only 30 yuan of payment a year, each person can enjoy basic medical services, including getting common medicines, each worth 20-30 yuan, for six times. If the person has to be hospitalized, he can get a co-pay of more than half of the cost,” said Lü, pointing out that in the cities, many people strongly feel that their medical care costs have been gradually coming down. “You can easily buy common medicines near your home, and they are cheap.”

The prime goal of the reform this time is to reduce the medical cost of individuals, making sure everyone enjoys medical insurance. As indicated in Director Zhang Ping’s report, the coverage of medical insurance has been expanding significantly. By the end of October last year, about 424 million workers and residents in cities have been covered by medical insurance, and more than 90 percent people in rural areas, or 835 million, have participated in the rural cooperative medical care system.

The medical insurance has been expanding from previously



Druggists put the essential drugs onto the shelves at a community drugstore in Diankou town, Zhejiang Province. The province has adopted policies to ensure zero profit when dealing with essential drugs. *Guo Bin*



Zhang Decai, a poor villager in the city of Huaying, Sichuan Province, receives medical aid at a health center. *CFP*

major illness only to less serious health problems. In 2010, the minimum medical assistance for each person was raised to 120 yuan a year. And the maximum amount covered by medical insurance was raised to about six times of a person's annual income. In most areas, the co-pay for hospitalization cost range from 60 to 75 percent. Some cities were even experimenting with including outpatient in the co-pay system. The government has also been streamlining the medical assistance system for low-income groups. Last year the government spent 11 billion yuan for medical assistance, twice the amount spent in 2008.

The payment system is also improving. With the promoting of a standard payment card, 90 percent of urban medical payment achieved real-time settlement, and 89.1 percent of those covered by rural cooperative medical scheme have the payment system at county levels.

"We have achieved the coverage of 90 percent, soon we'll cover 100 percent," Chen Xiaochuan, deputy director of the standing committee of the provincial People's Congress in Guangdong. A medical care system that covers all people will be the biggest accomplishment in more than 30 years of reform and opening-up. It is a big step forward, an important sign of better living standard, and a display of social equality.

Guo Shuqin, a deputy with the National People's Congress, said the coverage of all 1.3 billion people in this country will be an accomplishment we can be proud of. It is also an important part of what Premier Wen Jiabao said during the government work report earlier last year, "Let the people live a happier life with dignity."

Burdens in medical care reduced

For a long time, the government allows hospitals to sell medicines to patients with an increase of 15 percent on the wholesale prices. This is deemed the top culprit that pushed high the prices of medicines and medical services.

The reform aims to put forward a basic medicine system, reducing the burden on normal people, and ensuring the convenience and safety of medicines at grass-roots levels.

From the very beginning of the medical reform, the basic medicine system has been carried out in local hospitals. After comprehensive discussion, the State government issued a list of basic medicines, including 307 kinds, and allowed local governments to add their list in accordance to local preferences. So far 14 provinces and municipalities have announced their additional medicines. These basic medicines have been covered by medical insurance, which appeared to be purchased more than non-basic medicines.

NDRC Director Zhang Ping pointed out in his report that up to now, 26,006 government-run clinics in rural areas have implemented basic medicine system, accounting for 51 percent of all. Anhui, Jiangxi and Shaanxi are some of the pioneers. After stopping the charge of additional 15 percent of wholesale prices, basic medicines have seen an average fall of 30 percent in prices.

With the breakthrough in basic medicines, local governments have been pushing ahead structural reforms in grass-roots medical institutions, including the medical staff's performance review and payment systems. By the end of last September, 26 provinces or regions have put out their plans of institutional and personnel reform. Employees of the hospitals and clinics no longer enjoy "iron bowls" for their positions, and they are being paid according to their performance at their posts. Most of the grass-roots medical institutions have been seeing the fall of average medical costs.

The reputed "Anhui mode" started on September 1 last year, when a total of 1,868 medical institutions in the province began a comprehensive basic medicine system, and pushed ahead with structural reforms. The average cost of patients' each visit came down by 16 percent, hospitalization cost down 20 percent, and the number of visiting patients up 21 percent. More than 90 percent of local people and medical workers are satisfied with the improvement.



Druggists of traditional Chinese medicine fill prescriptions. CFP

Medical resources optimized

Grass-roots medical institutions are a weak link in China's medical service system. In rural areas, the lack of medical resources is particularly prominent.

"The inadequate medical services at grass-roots level drive off patients who do not have to visit bigger hospitals. This has worsened the difficulty of people to visit major hospitals, and pushed prices up." Zhang said changes at the grass-roots levels become a vital part of the reform.

Strengthening the grass-roots level includes raising the services standards of rural and neighborhood medical institutions, training qualified general practitioners, and shifting the purpose of grass-roots medical institutions to basic medical care and basic health care of local residents.

The local governments have also spared no efforts in promoting equality of basic medical services. Since 2009, free medical records have been established for 36 percent of urbanites and 24 percent rural residents; about 33 million patients with high blood pressures or diabetes enjoy standard cares. To deal with serious diseases, seven major programs were started, including vaccinating people under 15 against Hepatitis B. A program on mental diseases was started in 2010. The central government invested 2 billion yuan in 110 medical institutions across the country, with 1.1 yuan of additional facilities.

Since the reform was initiated, financial departments of all levels have been trying their best to ensure the funding for the medical reform despite pressures from the international financial crisis. In 2009, the government spent 399.4 billion yuan in medical services, up 39.7 percent from 2008. Of the total, central government funding was 127.3 billion, up 49 percent from 2008. In 2010, the budgeted medical spending was 443.9 billion yuan, with the central government giving out 138.9 billion. Most of the funding were used in the major five areas of medical reform, especially basic medical in-

surance, grass-roots medical services and equality of public health services.

"The government poured in hundreds of billions of yuan in the past few years, and has made a huge difference in the grass-roots medical institutions. Not only the housing conditions have improved, the basic medical equipment are also in place," said NPC Standing Committee member Hu Zhenpeng.

Zheng Gongcheng, another committee member, said the government has been making great efforts in the reform. In the past three years, the central government invested 850 billion yuan, the basic medical insurance in rural areas rose from 40 yuan to 80 yuan, and now up to 120 yuan. In 2010 the central government's investment in medical assistance rose to 11 billion, which was the highest ever.

Pilot programs in public hospital reform

Reform in public hospitals is the most important part of medical care reform. The public hospitals are the frontline of medical service, with all problems converging at these places and making the reform here "the hardest bones."

In February last year, the Ministry of Health and other four ministries jointly released a guideline for public hospital reform, announcing that 16 cities, including Shanghai, Zhenjiang and Anshan will be the key places for pilot programs. There are 31 provincial cities launching experimental programs, too.

A year has passed since then, and progress has been made in the cooperation between public hospitals and grass-roots medical institutions, internal management and diversifying medical services. So far, 1,100 AAA-class hospitals have established long-term cooperation relationship with about 2,140 county-level hospitals. Shanghai, Beijing and seven other municipalities or provinces in the developed east have been bridged with inland provinces in the western regions of China. More than 900 hospitals launched quality-service demonstration programs, about 100 hospitals started trial programs of electronic medical record of patients, 1,200 hospitals shortened diagnosis and waiting time by booking service. Five provinces experimented with new personnel programs, allowing doctors to practice at multiple hospitals or clinics.

In the meantime, the public hospitals are also trying to separate administration and medical services, and cut the selling of medicines from hospitals in order to avoid over-prescription.

Bai Keming, NPC Standing Committee member, said the medical service reform has seen significant progress since the central government started it in 2009. "But the reform is complicated and have a lot of difficulties, we can not over-estimate our accomplishment. It is just the beginning." ■

Big events of the medical care reform in China

As one of the most important livelihood issue, medical care is closely related with the health and happiness of millions of people and their families. Since the founding of New China, especially after the implementing of reform and open policy, the Medical Health System (MHS) has made remarkable achievement. However, there still exists conflicts between the current development of Chinese MHS and the needs of people and the demands of harmonious society.

To better satisfy people's increasing needs for medical service and continuously improve the quality of people's health, Chinese government has been working to deepen the reform of the MHS and speed up the development of medical health cause. Since it was launched, the MHS reform has gone through the following stages:

1949-78

the establishing of medical welfare system providing free medical care

August 1950, the first national health conference was held to ascertain the principle of "serving the workers, peasants and soldiers; focusing on prevention, integrating Chinese and Western medicine". A medical welfare system, which combined free medical care, medical insurance and cooperative medical services, was gradually established in the mainland of China until 1978, but the problem is prominent in the distribution of health resources.

1978-85

"to manage the medical health cause with economic means"

The Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the CPC, held in 1978, decided to transfer the working emphasis of the whole Party to the construction of modernization. Based on this guideline, the health department took the opportunity to strengthen the management of public health issues.

In 1979, the Ministry of Health and other two ministries jointly issued "The Notice on Strengthening the Management of Hospital Economic Pilot Project". The pilot projects were consequently launched with the principle of "fixed subsidy, economic accounting, and strict evaluation". The drawbacks of traditional hospital management were gradually revealed, it resulted in the issue of a series of policies to strengthen the management of hospitals.

March 1981, the Ministry of Health issued "The Provisional Measures on Hospital Economic Management" and the "Advice to Strengthen the Economic Management of Public Health Services". These policies alter the poor economic operations and accounting of health organizations.

1985-92

formal launch of MHS reform, expansion of hospital autonomy

January 1985, national conference of public health heads was held to implement the spirit of the "Decisions on the Reform of Economic System" issued by the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Cen-

tral Committee of the CPC, the comprehensive public health reform started from all cities; in April of the same year, the State Council approved the "Report on Issues of Public Health Reform Policies" raised by the Ministry of Health, and pointed out that "must undertake reform, relax the policy, simplify the administration, raise fund by all means, widen the road for health development, to improve the public health". Thus the curtain for the transformation of health organizations was unveiled.

November 1988, the State Council released the "three defines" plan (define the duties, define the structure, demine the number of posts). The plan determined the basic function of the Ministry of Health, required it to manage the affiliated organizations through indirect ways.

November 1989, the Ministry of Health officially issued notices and measures to apply stratified management of hospitals. Based on the tasks and functions, hospitals were classified in 3 levels and 10 grades, which can better reflect the actual quality of hospitals, and at the same time, enhance the orderly cooperation and competition under the supervision of the government.

From 1990, health reform moved towards new steps. In May the Ministry of Health set up the drafting team for the "Outline for the Public Health Development and Reform in China (1991-2000)". The outline was finally accepted with 12 rounds of revision, through continuous commenting and discussing, this process was significant for relevant parties to understand the meaning of health reform.

1992-2000

clarify several principles to separate the hospitals from medicine selling

September 1992, the State Council approved "Several Opinions to deepen the Medical Health System Reform", the Ministry of Health followed the spirit of "Construct by the government, Survive by the hospitals", encouraged the hospitals to support the basic medical services through increasing the incomes from additional services and subordinate services. This policy stimulated the hospitals to make more profit, thus reduced the public nature of medical care institutions. It also resulted in "the difficulty to visit a doctor", caused massive negative impacts.

In May 1993, with the opening of national conference of health administration, the debating about whether the MHS reform should be government-led or market-led gradually became a focal topic of all trades of the society.

In 1994, the State Commission for Reconstructing of Economic

System, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Health jointly developed “The Opinions on Reform of Medical System for Urban Workers”, launched the medical system reform in cities and towns. Approved by the State Council, Zhenjiang of Jiangsu province and Jiujiang of Jiangxi province became the pilot.

On December 9 1996, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council held the National Health Conference. The meeting laid a solid base for the further development of health reform.

2000-05 **the Ministry of Health clearly stated,** **“Commercialization is not the direction** **of medical reform”**

February 2000, the State Council published “The Guidance for Urban Medical Health System Reform”, announced the start of national medical reform. The main measures for this reform include: categorize the medical institutions as non-profit and for-profit; apply different policies for different groups; liberalize the price of for-profit medical services; enlarge the coverage of basic medical insurance; the health administration should change its role, separate the functions of government from those of institutions; apply stratified management to medical institutions, introduce competing system into government fund sectors, relax the control, regulate the operations, reform the medicine distribution system, separate the hospital from the medicine selling

October 2002, the State Council convened the National Conference of Rural Health, right after the meeting, the “Resolution to Further Strengthen the Rural Health Work” was issued in the name of CPC Central Committee and the State Council, it stressed the need to establish and perfect the new rural cooperative medical system and medical assistance system.

On January 16, 2003, the General Office of the State Council transmitted the “Opinions to Build New Rural Cooperative Medical System” raised by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Agriculture, and required the pilot to start soon. The same year, with the spreading of SARS in China, the problems emerged in the public health system received widely attentions.

July 2005, the Development Research Center of the State Council released a report about the medical reform, which described the medical reform in China as unsuccessful in general. The report attributed the failure to the market-orientation and commercialization of medical services in the past 20 years. The Ministry of Health confirmed “commercialization is not the direction of medical reform”, the target of medical reform was to build a medical insurance platform, which benefit “all people”, and more urban medical insurance pilots would be launched.

2005-08 **“Opinions to Deepen the Reform of Medical** **Health System (draft)” released**

In September 2006, Medical Reform Coordination Team, which consisting of members from eleven ministries and commissions, was established. The director of National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Health were both appointed

as head of the team.

Early 2007, Medical Reform Coordination Team commissioned 6 research institutions to conduct independent and parallel researches on the medical health system reform, 3 more institutions were added in the end. The report of the 17th CPC Congress, which was held in the same year, said “everybody should enjoy the basic medical health service”, “insist on the public nature of public health care”, “reinforce the government responsibility and investment”, clarified the guiding line for the medical reform.

October 14 2008, “Opinions to Deepen the Reform of Medical Health System (draft)” was published online for public comments.

2009-10 **result of the five reforms revealed, the** **people started to enjoy the benefit**

In April 2009, the Party Central Committee and the State Council announced the Opinion to Deepen the Reform of Medical Health System and the Focuses of Implementation Plan for Medical Health System Reform(2009-2010), set the target as to ease the difficulty to visit a doctor and reduce the high medical expenses. In the past two years, the five reforms designed by the plan have steadily progressed, the result gradually revealed.

An universal medical insurance has come into shape. For the moment, the basic medical insurance for urban and rural residents covered more than 1.26 billion population, it means the basic establishment of an universal basic medical insurance system, which combined medical insurance of urban residents and workers, new rural cooperative medical insurance as well as urban and rural medical assistance.

Essential Drug List(EDL) effectively reduced the high expenses of medicines. Besides the improvement of the medical insurance system, the bubble prices of medicines should be cut. The application of EDL is to light the burden of people. At present, the EDL covered around 60% of medical institutions national wide.

Condition for primary health care was obviously improved. As the government emphasized the importance of primary health care, great changes had happened in the county hospitals, village clinics and millions of other grass-roots medical service center. Meanwhile, at the basic level, a public medical service team featured with General Practitioners has started to work.

Basic public health service was further developed. For now, 48.7% of urban residents and 38.1% rural residents kept their health records.

The reform for public funded hospital moved steadily. Nearly 70% of pilot hospitals has established performance evaluation system, 54.2% has implemented the appointment system based on posts. Furthermore, the division between administration and operations, government and institutions, hospitals and medicines, profit and non-profit is advancing.

Today the meaning of basic medical and health system has become more clear, the government significantly strengthened the responsibility for the basic, the equality and accessibility of medical services were also greatly improved, the masses really enjoyed the benefits of the reform. The positive development and emerging benefits of the reform set a firm base for the completion of the 3-year medical reform plan. ■



Chinese children adopted by foreigners return to Yangzhou Children's Welfare Center in Jiangsu Province, where they have been raised, to seek their root. The newly-adopted Law of Application of Foreign Civil Relations stipulates more protections to the fostered children. *Fan Youlin*

Legislations on foreign-related civil affairs laws

By Zhang Weiwei

Nearly a decade has passed since China joined the World Trade Organization. China fulfilled all its WTO commitments and has established an economic trade framework conforming to the WTO rules, which made China one of the most open markets in the world.

China get increasingly involved in affairs related to the rest of world as the economic globalization grows. China's growing global involvement concerns not only business and trade, but also affairs related to Chinese citizens' daily life such as international marriages, labor export, purchase of overseas property

and outbound tourism.

As a result, the number of foreign-related civil and commercial cases rises sharply.

Thus, it has become a new challenge for China's law makers to handle foreign-related cases while China seeking a just and fair environment that is critical for further global involvement.

In response, the 17th Session of the Standing Committee of the 11th NPC issued recently the Law on the Application of Laws to Foreign-related Civil Relationships, which will formally enter into effect on April 1, 2011.

The new law not only establishes general principles concerning foreign-related civil relationships, but stipulates specific articles and provisions to address issues including marriage and family, inheritance, property rights, creditor's rights and intellectual property rights.

Chairman of the NPC Standing Committee Wu Bangguo said that the new law, which is based on China's current situation and uses international practices as references, is expected to match China's growing global involvement at different levels.

Legal framework to boost greater global involvement

The 31st Session of the Standing Committee of the 9th NPC reviewed a draft law concerning the law applicable to foreign-related civil relationships for the first time as early as 2002, when the draft was one chapter of the draft of China's Civil Law.

The NPC Standing Committee decided to review and pass the draft Civil Law chapter by chapter because it was colossal and far-reaching. Prior to the new law concerning foreign-related civil relationships, the legislature passed the Property Law in 2007 and the Tort Law in 2009 respectively.

"The world has undergone a sea change over the past seven years since China reviewed its first draft law concerning foreign-related relationships. It is the right time to introduce a dedicated law to address the issues," Xiao Yongping, executive vice president of China Association of Private International Law and dean of Wuhan University's Law School, told reporter.

Xiao said that it's become a must for China to give equal respect to both domestic and foreign laws and treat Chinese and foreign citizens in a fairer way not only because expectations have been high among the international community for China to be a responsible player following years of robust growth since 2002, but because it serves China's need to build a better global image.

"To some extent, the new law is kind of China's written vow to honor those commitments," Xiao said.

"The globalization has sped up the cross-border flow of talents, technology, capital and information, which requires an efficient legal system," Xiao said, noting that the new law, a legal guideline for handling foreign-related civil relationships while China further opens to the rest of the world, signals that the nation will address civil and commercial cases involving foreign and Chinese citizens with a fairer approach.

Existing laws and previous judicial practices paved the way for the introduction of the new law. General Principles of the Civil Law, the Succession Law, the Contract Law, the Law on Negotiable Instruments, the Civil Aviation Law, the Maritime Law, relevant judicial interpretations of the Supreme People's

Court as well international treaties endorsed by the Chinese government all include rules on the choice of law in foreign-related cases, which played an important role when the nation addressed cases concerning foreign civil relationships.

However, the rules scatter throughout different laws, regulations and judicial interpretations and lack consistency, which made it difficult to handle the cases properly and posed challenges to the legislation and justice.

Therefore, it is generally believed that a full-fledged separate statute with its own consistent inner logic will not only improve the legislation concerning laws on the choice of law in foreign-related cases to avoid legal conflicts, but ensure stringent law enforcement without inconsistency, many members of judicial and law society said, adding that the improvement will facilitate civil and businesses transactions involving foreigners and improve China's international image.

Fairness stressed

"The law is designed to address foreign-related cases, which determined that it must be open and compatible," Professor Xiao

The globalization has sped up the cross-border flow of talents, technology, capital and information, which requires an efficient legal system.



Chinese oil-rig drillers and their foreign counterparts work together in Saudi Arabia. CFP



A Chinese bridegroom pulls the red bridal veil of a foreign bride at a wedding ceremony held in the city of Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province. *Chen Gang*

said, adding that the new law, an important part of Chinese legislation, plays a unique role that bridges the legal gap between China and foreign countries.

It not only gives importance to rights of both domestic and foreign citizens and corporations, but also takes both China's current situation and international practices into consideration.

Many legislators deemed the new law broad-minded rather than self-concerned.

Professor Xiao agreed, noting that it is the only way to promulgate a law that can gain universal acceptance and endorsement, govern foreign-related civil affairs and solve foreign-related disputes.

It is based on this principle that the first article of the new law states that it is set to handle foreign-related cases with justice and safeguard the rights of all interested parties.

The new law adopts the closest connection principle, a standard international approach to the choice of law for foreign-related civil relationships, which required legislations, courts and arbitration agencies to apply the law having the closest connection to the specific civil relationship while handling relevant cases, according to Jia Dongming, deputy director of the civil law division under the Commission of Legislative Affairs of the NPC Standing Committee.

"It is the only way to handle foreign-related civil disputes properly," Jia said.

The law takes it into consideration that the number of the world's laws addressing international civil affairs is likely to grow and stipulates that the parties to a foreign-related civil relationship may expressly select the law to be applied to their legal relationship, which gives respect to the parties' wishes.

The new law also uses habitual residence as the point of contact

in most provisions, which means that the law of the party's habitual residence will be applied in foreign-related relationships.

The new law's use of habitual residence as the point of contact, rather than nationality or domicile, is designed to match the growing population mobility, according to Professor Xiao, who added that the rule makes it easier to identify more proper laws to handle certain cases.

Another highlight of the people-oriented new law is that it introduces specific provisions to address cases involving people to whom extra attentions should be paid. The law gives priority to laws that better protect the rights of weaker parties in civil and commercial relationships, Jia said, citing the personal and property relationships between parents and children. The new law stipulates in the same way that laws offering better protection to dependants will be applied in dependant-support relationship. And individual customers are entitled to choose the law most favorable to their interests in any given circumstances. In product liability cases, the party whose rights have been infringed is entitled to choose the applicable law.

Matching legislation to China's global role

"Much of international law requires extensive negotiation and compromise between nations," Professor Xiao told our staff reporter. He added that it is necessary for China to give emphasis on justice and fairness and give equal importance to the rights of all parties to a foreign-related relationship while safeguarding the nation's public interest and addressing its own concern when it comes to law-making of law on the choices of laws applicable to foreign-related civil issues, which is an important part of international private law.

The new law does provide parties to a foreign-related civil relationship, both Chinese and foreign ones, with the opportunity to choose the law to be applied to their legal relationship. Meanwhile it stipulates that China's mandatory law, if any, be applied directly. In addition, when application of foreign law would be against the public interest of China, Chinese law will be applied.

"It is an important facet of international private law to protect a nation's basic interests," Professor Xiao noted.

He added that China's international private law will surely be subject to amendments to match the nation's situation because its role in global politics, economy and culture is expected to undergo fundamental changes.

Concerning foreign-related civil and commercial relationships and create an international private law system with Chinese characteristics and features, Xiao said that the efforts to improve law-making and law enforcement will consolidate China's role in the process to set a new world order. ■

Law turns new page in China's social insurance system

By Xie Sufang

To get his retirement pension, Jiang Naiqun spent seven years to appeal and complain, running from Shenzhen, Nanjing to Beijing. Finally, in the year of 2009, his case got settled and he received the pension that he deserved.

Every year, large quantities of the migrant workers who have worked for many years in the coastal areas such as Shanghai,

Guangzhou and Shenzhen decide to stop their social insurance. Then only get small sum of insurance premium when they return their hometown.

Because medical care expenses could not be balanced between different regions, patients from underdeveloped areas always feel helpless in the face of the expensive cost for advanced medical technology and treatment in cities.



The establishment of a social insurance system enables the aged to enjoy a decent life after retirement. CFP



The Southeast Eye Hospital in Fuzhou, Fujian Province conducts medical examinations for senior citizens suffering from cataracts before free surgeries. CFP

Only by the integration of people's wisdom can the principles presented in its general provisions be realized.

These sad stories are expected to become history and never to repeat any more thanks to the adoption of a new law.

On October 28, 2010, the NPC Standing Committee enacted the Social Insurance Law, which is regarded as a basic law in the field of social insurance. For ordinary Chinese people, either dwelling in cities or in the country, they can abandon the traditional concept "rearing sons for help in old age." The law provides guarantee in both medical care and pension. Moreover, urban workers will also be covered in case of workplace injuries, maternity or unemployment.

It also stipulates national coordination of basic endowment insurance, cross-regional transaction of medical care. It breaks regional barriers to enable all citizens to enjoy unified social security.

Wisdom of the people

The Social Insurance Law, as the core of the social security system, takes all citizens as target, including the most issues of old age and medical care. So it must be set up on the principle of fairness. But it is an arduous challenge to establish a mode of so-

cial security system in accordance with our national conditions. The establishment of this law becomes a course of thoughts pooling and exploration over 16 years.

It is reported that the NPC firstly initiated the idea of social insurance legislation in 1994. In December 2007 the first deliberation of the draft was carried out on the 31st session of the Standing Committee of the 10th NPC. The draft was examined four times in the following three years.

"Most laws will be reviewed for three times, but this law has been reviewed four times in three years, which shows the concern to this law from people. In other words, this law touches upon highly critical issues, involving complicated questions," said Xin Chunying, who is deputy director of Legislative Affairs Commission and a member of NPC Standing Committee.

Social insurance concerns the interest of every citizen, so they all have the right of participation and discussion in its drafting. Only by the integration of people's wisdom can the principles presented in its general provisions be realized.

After the second reviewing of the draft law, from December 28, 2008 to February 15, 2009, the NPC Standing Committee solicited suggestions on it. During this period, a total of 70,501 suggestions were collected through Internet, newspapers and magazines. These suggestions came from 31 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities as well Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. Participants included government officials, workers from enterprises and institutions, rural workers, university students, experts and scholars, and overseas returnees. The suggestions touched upon the content of all the 91 sections of the draft, which were gathered by the Legislative Affairs Commission and put forward to the NPC Standing Committee for further review.

"This solicitation of opinions from the general public lasted 50 days, making it the longest one in the recent work of the Standing Committee of the NPC. In these days, the public showed great wisdom and enthusiasm. They displayed interest in the legislation of social insurance, proposed suggestions actively, put forward constructive opinions and suggestions, a lot of which have been absorbed in the draft bill," according to the Legislative Affairs Commission.

The legislation of the law was full of disputes and debates over the past three years. Even the minimal modification of a single clause would bring impact to people's life, so it is required for the legislators to look at problems in terms of the citizen's interest, to fully reflect their will.

"This law has been reviewed and revised for four times; it has become more complete in many aspects," said Wuritu, who is a member of the NPC Standing Committee, and vice chairman of NPC Finance and Economics Commission.

Xin said, "The lawful rights of the insured have been stressed in this law. In the design and implementation of the insurance system, governmental service has been the focus to protect the

rights of the insured; the design of a lot of specific clauses all aims to protect their rights.”

Professor Zheng Gongcheng said, “This law has defined labor’s social insurance rights and interests, explicated the responsibility and obligation that the State, government, employing units and employers should undertake for social insurance. It is of great significance to the establishment of the social security system in China, and serves a supportive law to the social law department. Without the law, the legal system of socialism with Chinese characteristics to be formed this year will be incomplete for the lack of a very important pillar.”

Professor Zheng is from the Labor and Personnel School of Renmin University of China, also a member of the NPC Standing Committee.

Seamless system

While the committee members of the NPC Standing Committee were investigating, collecting advice and modifying the draft constantly, the exploration and pilot projects in social security system was also moving forward rapidly. The State Council formulated and implemented a series of regulations and policies on social security systems.

Since 2009, the central government has accelerated the setting-up of social security system both in urban and rural areas, showing great concerns to the latter: implementing the pension system for rural residents and conducting pilot projects, setting up basic medical insurance system, implementing cooperative medical insurance in rural areas. All these efforts have realized the complete coverage of basic pension and medical care insurance to all people.

It should be noticed that, in the first rural insurance pilot projects, the initial State plan only covered people in 27 provinces, 320 counties and 4 municipalities, but the actual development has far exceeded the target. Up to now, more than 90% of the rural area has been covered by this insurance system; in Beijing, Tianjin and other places, the total coverage has been fulfilled.

“By the end of 2009, all provincial administrative areas have established overall planning of the endowment insurance. Twenty-five provincial units have reached the standard of overall planning already,” said Hu Xiaoyi, the vice-minister of Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.

“The social insurance system has basically cov-

ered all completely in terms of system, which is a very amazing achievement,” Xin said.

Data shows that, by the end of this June 2010, the insurance system has covered 245 million urban workers, the basic medical care insurance for urban and rural residents covered 1.25 billion people, 153 million people under the industrial injury insurance, nearly 60 million people for rural residents. By the end of 2010, the number of urban workers covered by basic endowment insurance, medical insurance, unemployment insurance, industrial injury insurance, maternity insurance will be up to 250 million, 1.25 billion, 130 million, 160 million, 120 million respectively, and the number of people covered by the insurance system for rural residents will be up to 100 million.

The practical experience of State and local governments in setting up and amplifying social security system, even problems that they faced all contributed to the establishment and approval



Aged people practice Taijiquan, a traditional Chinese shadow boxing. CFP



Senior citizens receive their pensions in Wuyuan county, Jiangxi Province.
Wang Guohong



Doctors implement examinations for people suffering from cataracts before free operations. CFP

Each review can be seen as an improvement to the previous legal draft, this approval of Social Insurance Law highlights a lot over the last bill.

of the Social Insurance Law, which can never be neglected, resulting in that a lot of feasible methods are formulated into the law, solidified as system.

“It is a significant achievement to establish the social insurance system covering all residents in urban and rural areas in the form of law. At the time of the first review, the coverage of the draft bill was still limited; in the following three years, the system of social insurance advanced constantly, while the social insurance awareness of citizens, enterprises and government raised and strengthened too,” Xin said.

“The system of the social insurance in China has been under reform for more than 20 years, the Social Insurance Law offers a legal basis for further reform, which has realized a significant transition from experimental stage to a new stage of stability and sustainable development,” Professor Zheng said.

New content added

Each review can be seen as an improvement to the previous legal draft, this approval of Social Insurance Law highlights a lot over the last bill.

As stipulated in the Social Insurance Law for the individu-

als participated in the Basic Endowment Insurance who has not paid the fees for 15 years when reaching legal retirement age, he can pay the reminder of fees up to 15 years, thus be able to be allowed basic pension monthly; Alternatively, the insured person in this case may transfer his or her account to rural social endowment insurance or social endowment insurance for urban residents. In either of these two ways, the insured person will be able to enjoy the corresponding endowment insurance according to the regulations of the State Council. The clause in the third draft that the insured person may withdraw his or her total pension at one time has been canceled.

This is because some committee members of the NPC Standing Committee believe that the purpose of the endowment insurance is to ensure the basic life of the retired, the withdrawal of endowment insurance at one time cannot play a role in supporting the retired, and it does not reflect social fairness. It is better to follow the principle of “more gain for more pay” in the aspect of social insurance. With the promotion of social endowment insurance for rural and urban residents in China, the two-way cohesive device between endowment insurance for urban and rural residents and basic endowment insurance for workers has been established in Beijing and other places, which has been proved to be effective in practice. So it is stipulated in the law that the insured person in this case may transfer his or her account to rural social endowment insurance or social endowment insurance for urban residents. In either way, the insured will be able to enjoy corresponding endowment insurance according to the regulations of the State Council.

In recent years, media reported mountains of leaks of personal information. But administrative departments, agencies and premium collecting organizations of social insurance and their

staff member have access to tremendous information about the insured people. The security of personal and working information becomes a major concern among some members of the NPC Standing Committee, who believe this information should be kept secret, cannot be leaked.

“Nowadays, it is necessary to offer ID number, telephone number in most cases in daily life, and then you just don’t know where your personal information goes. The leakage of personal information is rampant. Though laws, administrative statutes all have relevant regulations, but the problem still exists,” said Zhang Shicheng, who is deputy director of Administrative Law Office of the Legislative Affairs Commission of NPC Standing Committee.

Thus, a special clause is added in the newly-approved law. It is stipulated explicitly that the administrative department of social insurance and other relevant administrative departments, insurance organizations, premium collecting agencies and their staff members, shall apply the personal and working information of the insured people in accordance with the law, not to be leaked in any form. It is also stipulated that in case of the leakage of the personal and working information of the insured people, the principals and other people with direct liability of the administrative departments of social insurance and other relevant administrative departments, or operation organizations, premium collecting agencies shall be punished according to laws. If that causes loss to the employing unit or the insured person, it shall bear compensation responsibility.

In addition, the establishment of long-distance coordination device for medical insurance is also added to the third reviewed draft. It is stipulated as “necessary to set up long-distance transaction system for medical expenses, to facilitate the insured people to enjoy basic medical insurance.”

Foreigners working in China are also brought in by this insurance system, as stipulated in Article 99 that “The foreigners working within the territory of China shall participated in the social insurance as stipulated in this law.”

Further reform ushered

Reading through the Social Insurance Law carefully, you will find most of it is to be carried out under the authorization of the State Council.

As to this, Xin explained, “Some authorizations have been formulated, most of which has been written in regulations.” It is well considered to authorize the State Council: First, in the course that the system of social insurance is developing and changing rapidly, new mechanisms are to be set up with further explorations; some transitional measures cannot be fixed in the form of laws for future reform and development; Second, since China is a huge country, there is only a short history of the development of social insurance system.

To give full play of the enthusiasm of central and local governments, it is necessary to let them enjoy some rights in this regard.

“The authorization to the State Council will not influence the implementation of the law,” Xin told the media. “After the approval of this law, the NPC will supervise related departments of the State Council to formulate related regulations.”

“The system of social insurance is still in the course of creation and amplification; some systems have to be completed according to the economic and social development, so the law has to leave some space for future reform and development. In order to guarantee the implementation of this law, the State Council is advised to formulate and revise relevant laws as soon as possible,” said Zhang Bailin, who is a vice chairman of the NPC Law Commission.

The social security system of China is still at the starting

stage, which has to be generalized, revised in implementation constantly. China is entering the aging society fast. The gaps between urban and rural development, among different groups are being enlarged. There is still a long way to go to establish a fair and complete social security system to serve all the people. The approval of the Social Insurance Law is just a new start. ■



Rural patients in Linli county, Hunan Province are glad to finish applications for reimbursements. *Chen Qisong*

Stories behind the 'grassland protection' proposal

By Yu Hao



A prairie in the Inner Mongolia
Autonomous Region. CFP

“Beautiful prairie is my home, I love the clear water and the lovely grass, grassland is like a sea of green, yurt is like the white lotus flower, the herdsmen draw the picture of their happy lives, the picturesque scene of the spring last thousands of miles...” When the reporter called Seyintu, the NPC deputy grew up from the grassland, also the head of Ewenki autonomous banner of Inner Mongolia; the popular song widely sung on the grassland came out of the phone.

“I am happy! Very satisfied!” In the short conversation, Seyintu expressed several times his satisfaction with the following-up of the proposals raised by the deputies. Because the head of the banner is pleased to see his proposal exposed the “award situation” of the grassland to the Central Committee: The glamorous Euphorbia flower has turned the stretching green grassland into interlaced small pieces of white and red, owing to the long lasting drought and excessive grazing, the lush grasslands became bare floor covered with yellow sands; the grassland ecology system went generally worse though a few spot got improvement; the tendency of overall deterioration was still not under control...

But what satisfied him more is that: the central government has allocated the allowance of 7 billion and 3.8 billion RMB each year to compensate the deferring of grazing with 6 RMB per mu, and the balanced grazing with 1.5 RMB per mu; what's more, the subsidies for good breed, variety of grass and other production materials had been increased to solve the difficulties in work and living of herdsmen.

Why would the central government like to launch the policy? Let's look back to the “two sessions” held in 2010.

A proposal evoking collective sympathy

March 5, the weather was still chilly;

deputies from Inner Mongolia attending the third session of the 11th NPC were hot in discussion. “The climate disaster in 2009 affected 630 million mu of grassland, 969 thousand livestock died which brought about a direct loss of 1.78 billion RMB”, “comparing with 70s last century, the yield of grass in controlled area and non-controlled area has decreased by 25% and 50% respectively!” “Taking year 2008 as example, the average net income of peasants of 33 grazing banners, if deduct living cost of 5,766 RMB, only 420 RMB was left, it is hard to maintain the simple reproduction for the next year; the annual net income of family without or with few livestock is usually below 1000 RMB, it is difficult to keep a normal living standard, they have to live with the low-income

insurance, the income from the lease of grasslands and part-time work.”... In that afternoon, 7 deputies mentioned the contradiction between the protection of grassland ecology and the herdsmen's intention to increase the incomes.

“The grassland occupies 41% of total land area of our country, there are 1.3 billion mu grasslands in inner Mongolia, averagely about one mu per capita. In the past the grasslands were only regards as the food of livestock, but the fact estimated by experts is that, the more important function to protect the environment was overlooked, only 6% of the gross value was utilized as feeding materials.” Having worked on the grassland for more than 20 years, deputy Seyintu emphasized, the same attention should be given to grasslands as we did

for agriculture.

The same as Seyintu, the other NPC deputy Liqiqige, after serious discussion with local people's congress and on-site study, found that grassland protection is a problem that cannot be neglected. Therefore, when submitting the proposal, she wrote 8 pages at a time. Li told the reporter, the one-year in-depth study in the pastoral area and in the family of herdsmen made her aware of the severe ecological problem in the grasslands. On one hand, protection is absolutely necessary, on the other hand, the pastoral families have to raise more livestock to increase their income, it requires the government to develop a comprehensive policy integrating the grassland ecology protection and the healthy development of animal husbandry.

It requires the government to develop a comprehensive policy integrating the grassland ecology protection and the healthy development of animal husbandry.

In the end, “the proposal to further strengthen the grassland ecology protect” was submitted to the third session of the 11th NPC on behalf of the Inner Mongolia delegation. Meanwhile, 14 other deputies from Sichuan delegation also realize the long term economic development of herdsmen must face the problem of regional ecology protection. Therefore, they jointly proposed a mechanism of compensated use of grassland and an eco-compensation system.

The proposal provoked strong reactions, Premier Wen Jiabao, Vice Premier Li Keqiang, Secretary of CPC Disciplinary Commission He Guoqiang and Vice Premier Hui Liangyu all made important instructions.

After the closure of the “two sessions”, the proposal of Liqiqige, Wu



Seyintu, who serves as the head of Ewenki Banner in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, is a deputy to the National People's Congress. *Li Tao*

Introducing proposals and suggestions is an important way for the NPC deputies to perform its duties granted by the law.

Zegang and Seyintu was combined with other similar proposals of NPC, and refined as “improve the grassland protection, perfect the pastoral subsidies policy, and increase the income of herdsmen”. It is also marked as the key proposal of 2010; the Ministry of Finance will take the lead, while supervised by the NPC Agriculture Committee.

Key proposal achieving effective result

Introducing proposals and suggestions is an important way for the NPC deputies to perform its duties granted by the law. The standing committee of NPC paid great attention to the role of deputies, and put much weight to supervise the following-ups of the proposals.

For this proposal specifically, NPC Agriculture Committee is not new. As the problem raised by the proposal has been concerned since last year, a report was made to the Standing Committee. Wu Bangguo and Uyunqing, as Chairman and Vice Chairman of NPC Standing Committee, gave important instructions on the report, asked the Agriculture Committee to undertake specific investigation and make recommendations based on comprehensive analysis. Accordingly, the Agriculture Committee sent Wang Yunlong, Sun Wensheng, Yin Chengjie and Fu Tinggui to carry out researches in Inner Mongolia, Jilin, Gansu and other places.

Despite the extensive understanding of the problems existed in the grassland ecology construction, the NPC Agriculture Committee didn't have slightest slack. They went to different cities in Inner Mongolia, Qinghai and Tibet. Leaders from other relevant ministries attached great importance for the work. The Ministry of Finance and the Agriculture Working Office of CPC formed

special working group to investigate the problems in 7 cities and 9 counties. The expert team from the Ministry of Agriculture came to Chenbaerhuqi of Hubunbeir City and Damaoqi of Baotou City, focused on the construction of Grassland Sci-Tech Demonstration Zone. Research team from the Ministry of Agriculture, National Development and Reform Commission and Ministry of Water Resources studied the eco-compensation problem in Xilingol and Erdos City.

In a short 6 months, detailed reports about the research were submitted: Among 6 billion mu of natural grassland in China, only 5 billion mu is usable. The area of grassland is 3.2 times and 2.3 times of the size for farmland and forest, accounts for 63% of the green ecosystem in China. Being affected by the climate warming, overgrazing, illegal cultivation, inappropriate developing and other factors, grassland is suffering from severe deterioration. 90% of the grassland is degraded to certain extent, while around 2.3 billion mu is moderate degraded. Grassland affected by serious soil erosion has topped 200 million mu. Recent years, rats and insects damage 600 million mu of grassland every year, but less than 20% is under control. The harsh natural environment, the backward economic condition and the poor cultivating skills lead to singular and extensive production model. Having more livestock is the only way to increase the income, thus the develop always follows the traditional rule of “population growth – livestock expansion – grassland degradation – less efficiency – low income increase”

July 16, the NPC Agriculture Committee held a special workshop in Inner Mongolia about the construction of grassland ecosystem and the implementation of the Key Proposal, people from local agriculture committees, relevant department of State Council and

Among 6 billion mu of natural grassland in China, only 5 billion mu is usable.

members of NPC were invited to discuss the solution and further improve the supervising work. “From the proposal and the discussion hosted by the Agriculture Committee, we see the suggestions of the deputies from the angle of State ecological safety, we need to develop practical policies in urgency to increase the income of herdsmen and ensure the economic growth of the pasture areas; we should establish a subsidiary and reward combined mechanism to achieve a sustainable development and maintain long term harmony between the grassland and people.” The Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Finance Hu Jinlin commented. And then the support from MoF stepped on the fast track.

October 12, the executive meeting of the State Council reviewed and approved the policy proposed by the Ministry of Finance, it aimed to increase the income of the herdsmen through establishing a grassland ecology protection system combining subsidies and rewards, it was also agreed, the ecology protection system will be launched in 8 pasture provinces (autonomous regions) from 2011 onward.

NPC deputies played an important role

The idea of “grassland ecology protection” was initialed by several deputies, then formal proposal was submitted on behalf of the Inner Mongolia delegation, in the end the NPC enlisted “improve the grassland protection, perfect the pastoral

subsidies policy, and increase the income of herdsmen” into the key proposals to be implemented, the role of the NPC deputies were remarkable.

“The proposal to ‘improve the grassland protection, perfect the pastoral subsidies policies, and increase the income of herdsmen’ by Liqiqige, Seyintu, Wu Zegang and the Inner Mongolia delegation, is one of the 13 key proposals decided by standing committee of the NPC. It is selected from 7,590 proposals by all deputies, reflecting the government’s determination to protect grassland and increase the income of herdsmen.” said Vice Chairmen Uyunqing, the successful implementation of this key proposal reflected the determination of the State Council and relevant departments, the effective supervision of the NPC; and it was also the result of cooperation and joint efforts.

“Grassland ecology construction is of great significance, through survey and research, the deputies raised problems to the point, plays an important role.” Wang Yunlong, Chairman of the NPC Agriculture Committee believes, accurate selection of focus is the pre-condition to follow up the proposals of the deputies. First, grassland ecology involves the development, the improvement of living condition of the herdsmen, it is a problem of development; It is also a problem of environment. Environment damaged, there will be no foundation for development, and people will lose their living condition. Therefore, the importance of grassland protection should be considered both from the economic develop-

ment and from the environment protection, but development should not damage the environment, on the contrary, environment protection is the base for development. Second, grassland ecology is not only an economic issue, but also a political issue, especially those remote grassland areas, where many minorities lived, are related to our border security, national unity ethnic harmony and social stability. In addition, the grassland ecology seems to be a local issue, but it is also an issue from the overall point of view. Taking the grassland of Inner Mongolia as example, it is directly related to the development of Beijing-Tianjin region, it involves northern China and even the whole country. Xinjiang, Tibet, Qinghai and other places where grassland located

In addition, the grassland ecology seems to be a local issue, but it is also an issue from the overall point of view.

are all of overall importance.

“you can see, the key proposals are the central tasks of the party and the government, are important to reform, development and stability, are the hot concerns or people, are issues which can get effective results through concrete following-up,” Chairman Wang Yunlong said, all departments must pay close attention to the key proposals, as it embodies the duties of the people’s deputies, and it is an important aspect for the highest power of the country to fulfill its responsibility.

Liqiqige, who just received the reply from the NPC Standing Committee about the following up of the key proposals, told the reporter, it is good to know the proposal benefits not only the grassland and herdsmen of Inner Mongolia, but also other 8 provinces and regions. “I will

carefully study the grassland policies issued by the government, I hope to bring more good suggestions to the “two sessions” next year for the eco-construction of the grassland and the wealthy of the herdsmen.” Deputies Seyintu also expressed the intention to bring more grassland eco-construction suggestions to the next “two sessions” in 2011.

To better play the role of the deputies, the Ministry of Finance planed its future work. “The Ministry of Finance will ask the local financial department to report specifically to the local People’s Congress, acquiring the support from local people’s congress and its members, further improve relevant legal system, provide effective legal protection for the implementation of the policies. Meanwhile,

people’s congress and people’s deputies must strengthen its function of supervising and guiding, to facilitate the management work of the local government.” Assistant Minister Hu Jinglin said.

While implementing the key proposal to “improve the grassland protection, perfect the pastoral subsidies policy, and increase the income of herdsmen”, the NPC deputies seriously performed their duties, NPC and its standing committee respected the role of deputies, conducted effective supervision. The managing department focused on solving problems from a systematic perspective, established a long-term mechanism covering the whole country. All these not only brought effective feedbacks for the proposals, but also strengthened the role of deputies. ■

If you have ever been to Tibet and experienced the grandeur of Himalayas and the Yarlung Zangbo River, you must be aware of the drastic changes happening in this expansive region.

Tibet Autonomous Region is about to celebrate its 45th anniversary this September, which coincides with the 45th anniversary of the region’s People’s Congress. Tibetans have become masters of their own destiny over the past 45 years. In old Tibet, the living of numerous serfs and slaves’ survival was not guaranteed, not to mention any political rights. In line with China’s Constitution and the Law on Regional Autonomy, the central government and the local government have taken concrete steps to enhance regional autonomy and Tibetans’ democratic rights after the establishment of the autonomous region. Forty-five years are not a long period; yet the drastic changes happening on the snowy plateau have achieved widespread accolades.

The establishment of the region’s first People’s Congress and its standing committee has fully demonstrated the vitality and advantages of the political system.

Establishment of 1st People’s Congress in Tibet

On September 1-9, 1965, the region’s first meeting of the first People’s Congress was held in Lhasa, which marked a progress in the democratic movement and the start of a socialist era and tens of thousands of serfs becoming the masters of the New China and new Tibet. Among the 301 delegates attending the meeting, 226 were Tibetans, 75 from Han, Menba, Luoba, Hui, Naxi, Nu and other ethnic groups. The majority of the delegates were former serfs and slaves and the rest were patriotic upper class and religious believers. Among the delegates



Establishment of the first People's Congress in Tibet

By Wang Dewen

were serf turned county chiefs, district chiefs and village heads, primary school teachers, factory workers, doctors, technicians and PLA soldiers. Those former serfs solemnly raised their hands to elect

the first people's government in the region's history.

Vice premier Xie Fuzhi, on behalf of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, the State Council,

Chairman Mao Zedong and Vice Chairman Liu Shaoqi, read a congratulatory letter at the opening ceremony on September 1. At the meeting, delegates discussed the candidates for the People's Council. Ngapoi Ngawang Jigme was elected as the first chairman of the council.

The meeting was concluded on September 9 after a series of resolutions were passed. The Tibet Autonomous Region was officially established. In the afternoon, more than 30,000 people from all walks of life attended a grand celebration in the Lhasa Gymnasium. The participants held bouquets and beat drums, celebrating the advent of a new era of Tibet.

Founding of Standing Committee

In July 1979, the 1st session of the 5th National People's Congress passed the law on organizational structure of the local governments. According to the law, People's Congresses at the county level and above will set up standing committees, which was a milestone of China's democratic progress. Tibet People's Congress was the first among those at the provincial level to establish a standing committee.

On August 6-14, 1979, the second session of the 3rd Tibet People's Congress was held in Lhasa. A total of 639 delegates attended the meeting and exercised their rights. In addition to review and discussion of government reports, the delegates elected the Standing Committee of the congress, its director, vice directors and 32 members. Ngapoi Ngawang Jigme became the first chairman of the Standing Committee. Since then the Standing Committee of the Tibet People's Congress exercises its rights prescribed by the Constitution and laws, prioritizes economic growth and social stability, and provides strong support to the region's development. ■

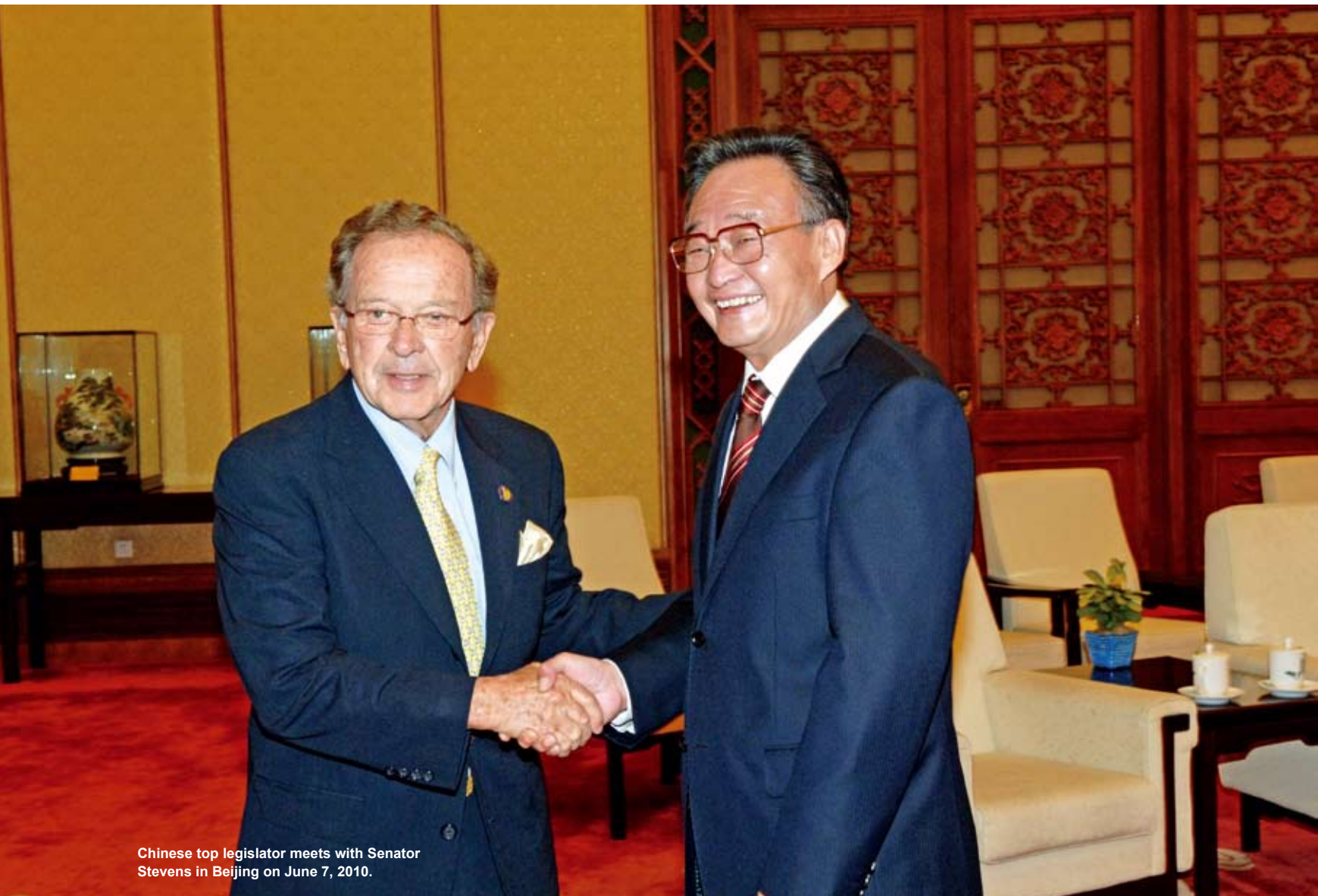


Tibetan constituents in Changdu County, Tibet Autonomous Region cast their votes. *File photo*

‘I love and respect China’

***–In memory of US Senator and
President Pro Tempore Ted Stevens***

By Cao Weizhou



Chinese top legislator meets with Senator Stevens in Beijing on June 7, 2010.

A life shaped by flying

It was a late autumn day in Washington, US. The wind was rustling and maple leaves were falling. Four F-22 Raptors performed a fly-over and a band played dirges at Arlington National Cemetery near the Potomac River decked out with flowers on September 28, 2010 during the funeral services for former Senator and President Pro Tempore Ted Stevens. Nearly 1,000 people including the current President Pro Tempore Daniel K. Inouye and more than 60 senators attended the funeral to pay their last respect to the political legend.

Born in 1923, Stevens died August 9 last year in a plane crash. Being a veteran pilot since youth, he survived a previous crash in 1978 and won two Distinguished Flying Cross for his service in the air force.

A wreath presented by Chairman Wu Bangguo of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) and Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi was placed in front of the casket. Flowers of the wreath include yellow and white lilies, red roses and forget-me-nots. The yellow lilies and red roses—the colors of China's national flag—represented Chinese people's compassion towards their longtime friend. And the white Chinese lilies and the alpine forget-me-nots, the Alaska's state flower, represented the endless grief shared by Chinese and American people for the loss of an emissary of friendship. Chinese Ambassador to the US Zhang Yesui offered sincere condolences to Stevens' family on behalf of the Chinese people.

Stevens had a close bond with China. The friendship dated back to 1943 and 1946 when he served as a First Lieutenant Army Air Forces C-47 pilot in the China-Myanmar-India Theater with the "Flying Tigers". He established brilliant military achievements in China's War of Resistance Against Japanese Invasion as well as the war Against Fascism. Stevens, a zealous advocate of US-China friendship, had been concerned with China's



Mr. and Mrs. Stevens and their daughter (right).

development ever since. He had participated in a number of exchange activities between non-government organizations of the two countries in the early 1970s before the two established diplomatic relations. He visited China as a member of a US Senate delegation not long after the two nations set up diplomatic ties, briefing Deng Xiaoping on the federal administration's policy toward China. Stevens spent his honeymoon with his wife Catherine in China and named their daughter Lily after

the Chinese flower. He fostered an inter-parliamentary relationship with China's NPC after he served as Senate President Pro Tempore since 2003, working with great efforts and efficiency to boost sound and stable US-China relations. He outlined a blueprint to escalate exchanges between the two countries' legislatures to new heights for a brighter future of bilateral cooperation even during his last visit to China in June 2010.

High-level visits built trust

Stevens was not a stranger to Chinese leaders. Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping received him as early as 1981 when the American statesman served as the Assistant Republican Leader. After that, Stevens visited China several times and had been in frequent contacts with Chinese leaders. Stevens used to enthuse about his association with NPC Standing Committee Chairman Wu Bangguo. Wu told him that Chinese people always act in good faith and never forget people who helped them and those who boosted Sino-US relations.

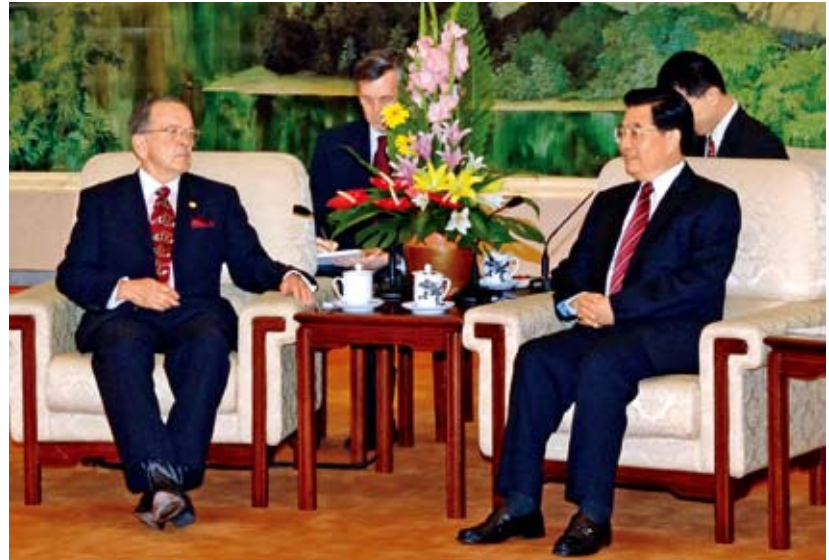
Chairman Wu arranged a meeting with his long-time friends, Mr. and Mrs. Stevens and their companions, in Beijing in June 2010. At that time, the top Chinese



A burial ceremony for Senator Stevens is held at the Arlington National Cemetery in the US on September 28, 2010.



Former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping meets with visiting Senator Stevens and his colleagues in 1981.



Chinese President Hu Jintao meets with the delegation headed by Senator Stevens on August 12, 2006.

legislator was to start a tour to three European countries and participate in the third World Conference of Speakers of Parliament. During their meeting, Stevens shared with Wu and other friends his wartime memory during which he served as a pilot with the “Flying Tigers”. He said that he would keep up the friendship forever. Wu told Stevens that he too felt especially pleased with their visit and recalled their meeting in the US nine months ago.

The top legislator led a delegation for an official good-will visit to the US in September 2009 and visited Stevens’ hometown Alaska. Wu met Stevens and his family in the state capital Anchorage. Stevens, who had resigned from his post, remained concerned about Sino-US relations and exchanges between the two countries’ legislatures. He told Wu that he had worked and lived in China for some time. And he harbored compassion towards Chinese people. He added that he was proud that he and Senator Daniel K. Inouye joined the efforts to initiate the mechanism of regular meetings between the US Senate and China’s NPC, one of the most important mechanisms of exchanges between US Congress and foreign legislatures. He said that he would remain concerned with the bilateral ties between the two countries even though he had retired. Those remarks

were straight revealing his genuine compassion for China.

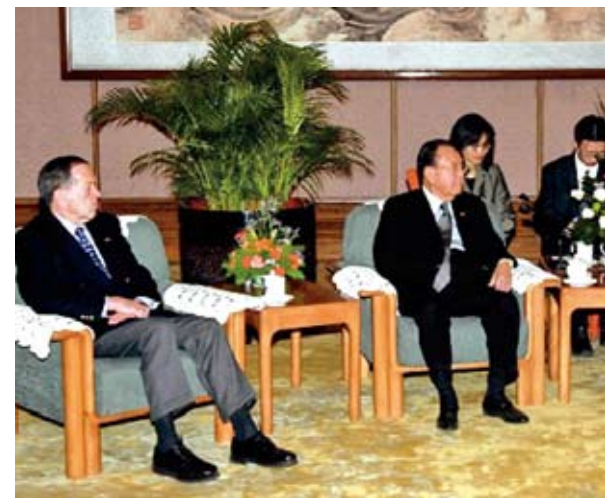
The Chinese top legislator’s two meetings with a former US Congress leader within nine months definitely exemplified China’s full appreciation for Stevens’ efforts to boost Sino-US relations and the profound friendship between the two friends.

The top legislator has been in frequent contacts with Stevens in the past several years. I had the impression that they always arranged a meeting during their visits to the US or to China. The Chinese

top legislator received Stevens in August 2004 when the latter, then the Senate’s President Pro Tempore, headed a delegation to China for a visit, which officially launched the mechanism of exchanges between NPC and the US Senate. The two got to know one another during their first meeting and built friendship. They reached consensus on a wide arrange of issues, particularly the newly-established interparliamentary conference, on which they had high expectations. Following practices proved that the mechanism has evolved into an important avenue to



The then Premier Zhu Rongji meets with visiting Senator Stevens and his delegation in March 2003.



The then NPC Standing Committee Chairman Li Peng meets with the delegation headed by Senator Stevens in March 2002.

boost mutual understanding, foster mutual trust and promote consensus thanks to the two leaders support and endeavors. On another occasion, the then-President Pro Tempore Stevens went all the way from Washington to New York for a meeting with Wu in September 2005 when the Chinese top legislator headed a NPC delegation to attend the second World Conference of Speakers of Parliament. Acquaintances between friends grew when they met once again. In August 2006, Stevens headed a delegation as scheduled to Guilin, China for the third regular meeting between the two nation's legislatures. The Chinese top legislator held his third meeting with Stevens during the senator's stop in Beijing. The two leaders went further and had candid exchanges of views on issues of common concern, though they differed on some of them.

Friendship and mutual trust between the Chinese top legislator and Stevens built on as contacts between the two men grew more frequent. The more important thing was that the pair often put forward proposals concerning better exchanges between the two nations' legislatures in an instructive and constructive approach and put them into practice through proper methods, which played a positive role in boosting bilateral relations.

Exchanges renewed friendship

China's NPC and the US Congress' House of Representatives had staged a number of exchange activities and achieved fruitful results by March 2003 when the 10th NPC convened since the Chinese legislature and the House launched a mechanism of exchange in April 1999. However, the US Senate lagged behind the House due to a lack of similar mechanism. Calls for more exchanges with the NPC grew in the Senate.

In January 2003, Stevens was elected Senate President Pro Tempore (the third in the line of succession for the presidency in US political system after the Vice President and Speaker of the US House of Representatives) and mulled putting his ideas into practice – establishing a mechanism of exchange between the NPC and US Senate. He said that many of his colleagues in the US Congress (100 senators and 435 representatives), young ones in particular, lacked profound knowledge of China. A mechanism of exchange between the US Senate and the Chinese NPC would not only push more senators, young senators in particular, to learn more about China, but help reduce conflict and avert crisis. Stevens spared no efforts to foster

the interparliamentary relationships.

Stevens contacted Chinese Embassy in the US in March, October and December in that year, stating that he would like to urge the US Senate in person to establish an office of interparliamentary affairs and launch a mechanism of exchange between the two sides. The proposal of Stevens, a revered statesman in Republican Party and the Congress, got positive response among the congressmen from both Republican and Democratic parties, including the then-Majority Leader of the Senate Bill Frist (R), the then-Minority Leader Thomas Daschle (D) and Stevens' long-time friend, the current President Pro Tempore Daniel K. Inouye. Stevens and Frist jointly put forward to the Congress a bill regarding the authorization for the establishment of an office of inter-parliamentary affairs in July 2003, which the then-President George W. Bush signed into an appropriations act. The act laid legal basis for the interparliamentary exchange between China and US. Meanwhile, Stevens offered to serve as the chair of the US and China Interparliamentary Conference. He managed to win bipartisan support in the Congress and got a number of influential senators involved, which ensured a balanced organization structure for the exchange program. Stevens, who once served as chairman of the Senate's Appropriations Committee, was deeply aware



Premier Wen Jiabao meets with Senator Stevens on August 4, 2004.



Senator Stevens shows the pictures taken during his participation in the Anti-Japanese War when meeting with the NPC Standing Committee Chairman Wu Bangguo in Beijing on June 7, 2010.



Chinese top legislator Wu Bangguo meets with Senator Stevens and his family members in the State of Alaska when he paid a visit to the US in June 2009.



NPC Standing Committee Chairman Wu Bangguo meets with Senator Stevens when he attended the Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments in the New York City in September 2005.



of the importance of funding and worked with other senators and included in the act provisions concerning appropriations for the exchanges, which secured funding for the program.

The two sides had been in frequent contacts for the establishment of the conference since March 2003 when China formed a new term of NPC and Stevens' name appeared in many documents concerning preparation for the launch of the program. I was impressed when Lü Congmin, deputy director of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the NPC, told me during our talks about efforts to enhance Sino-US relations that Stevens had said on multiple occasions that he was willing to do more work in his lifetime to boost bilateral ties between the two countries.

The two sides came to details about preparation for the launch of the program late November 2003, when the then-Vice Chairman and Secretary-General of the NPC Standing Committee Sheng Huaren came all the way to Shanghai and held a meeting with Stevens and Daniel K. Inouye on behalf of the Chinese top legislator during their brief stop in the city on their way to Thailand for a visit. Stevens said that the Republican and Democratic parties in the US Congress had reached a consensus on the exchange program and appointed him to chair the US and China Interparliamentary Conference. He sug-

gested that the Chinese side name his counterpart for the program as soon as possible and the two sides hold preliminary meetings to work out detailed arrangements for the exchange. Sheng and Stevens built friendship between their meetings, which facilitated the launch of the program.

Sheng then headed a delegation to Hawaii for an interparliamentary meeting in early January 2004 after his appointment as chairman of the Sino-US Interparliamentary Conference, which was approved by Chairman Wu Bangguo and Vice Chairman Wang Zhaoguo. Sheng held a meeting and three talks with Stevens during January 2-3, 2004, exchanging views on issues concerning the Sino-US relations, the Taiwan question and the interparliamentary exchange. Stevens suggested name the mechanism of exchange "Conference" to highlight its being formal and high-level. The meeting, the first one between chairs of the conference, decided the leadership of each side and location and date for the first interparliamentary conference. The two sides signed the Memorandum of Understanding drafted by China during the meeting in Hawaii, a document which defines the exchange program.

The first Interparliamentary Conference was held in Beijing in August 2004, marking the official launch of the exchange program. Stevens headed a Senate delegation to China for a visit and jointly presided

over the conference with Sheng. Chinese President Hu Jintao, NPC Standing Committee Chairman Wu Bangguo and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao received the US delegation separately. Sheng accompanied the US delegation during their visit for a tour to Dunhuang in Gansu Province and Kashgar in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Following the first conference, the two sides staged three interparliamentary conferences and two chair-level talks. The two sides, Sheng and Stevens as chair of each side in particular, invested a substantial amount of time and energy in establishing the exchange mechanism and fostering its development. The two men built close official connections and a private friendship. The pair exerted their influences over their colleagues and got more and more of them involved in the exchange activities, making the program an important avenue to foster efficient communication, bridge a gap of misunderstanding and seek consensus. The Interparliamentary Conference initiated by the two sides has played a unique role in boosting bilateral ties and interparliamentary exchanges between the two countries.

Flights over "the Hump" forged a bond

Not a single visit to China or a meeting with Chinese leaders ever failed to in-



Chinese top legislator Wu Bangguo holds a meeting with Senator Stevens, the president pro tempore of the US Senate, on August 11, 2006.



Sheng Huaren (middle), a vice chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, meets with Senator Stevens, also the president pro tempore of the US Senate, in Hawaii in January 2007.

voke Stevens' memory of the war years in China when he served as a pilot with the "Flying Tigers" during China's Resistance War Against Japanese Invasion, an experience that solicited his long-time compassion towards China, a land he regarded his second motherland.

Flying Tigers, formally known as the 1st American Volunteer Group of the Chinese Air Force, was founded by Major General Claire Lee-Chennaul. The group later became part of the 14th Army Air Force, which not only helped build Chinese air force and fight Japanese invaders, but break Japan's blockades and flew supplies from India over "the Hump" of the

Himalayan Mountains to China. Stevens joined the "Flying Tigers" during the period and flew supplies and personnel for the forces.

The then-Vice Chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee Stevens and his long-time friend Democratic Senator Daniel K. Inouye jointly headed an 11-member US Senate delegation for a visit to China on the invitation of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chinese National People's Congress in the spring of 2002 when I served as the committee's director. I was honored to participate in the reception of the delegation and accompanied the delegation's tour to Kunming in Yun-

nan Province. I had an impression during our first meeting that Stevens, an elegant and modest man, still had the determined and piercing look of a veteran pilot who risked his life and flew over "The Hump" of the Himalayan Mountains, fighting the fascism side by side with Chinese people during World War II. I learned that Stevens dreamed a visit to relics of World War II in Yunnan to march the legendary flight route once again. People are inclined to become nostalgic when they become aged. It is especially true when it comes to a foreigner like Stevens, who spent his youth in China fighting for peace. It is an experience that one can never forget. He enthused about his old days in China along the border between China and Myanmar. He said that he had been transferred from the force's India-Myanmar Theater to Yunnan and conducted operations in Kunming and many other places in the province for 15 unforgettable months before the surrender of Japan. He flew cargo planes and transported bombs and gasoline drums for US forces in China. He said that their operations spanned many places in Yunnan and used natural grass-land as airport to avoid being detected by Japanese forces. It was very easy for the pilots to get lost after they ended their flights without a homing signal. But what impressed Steven was that



A file photo of Ted Stevens during the Second World War.



Senator Ted Stevens (first from right) plants a tree before the monument which marks the Hump air route during the Second World War, in March 2002 in Yunnan Province.



The monument to mark the Hump air route in Kunming, Yunnan Province



Senator Ted Stevens pays a visit to Nanjing Cemetery of Anti-Japanese Aviation Martyrs in Jiangsu Province on June 11, 2010.



Senator Stevens pays a tribute to those buried at the Nanjing Cemetery of Anti-Japanese Aviation Martyrs on June 11, 2010.



The Nanjing Memorial Hall of the Anti-Japanese Aviation Martyrs gives Senator Stevens a model of transport plane that he had flown during the Second World War, as a gift.



The author of the article has a picture taken with Senator Stevens at the airport.

Nanjing Anti-Japanese Aviation Museum, where he signed the museum's guestbook and planted a tree in memory of the martyrs. Stevens donated a batch of his old photographs taken during his war years in China and an army-issued silk map of China, which was a must item of the Flying Tigers members' aviation survival kits. The map remained intact and was in good condition though six decades passed, which makes it an extremely precious gift to the museum. In return, the museum presented Stevens a pamphlet with a roster of deceased American pilots and a model C-47 cargo plane that he flew in the war years as gifts. Stevens was much moved at the model, saying that he would store it at home for safekeeping.

they were always received with hospitality by local Chinese people no matter where they landed, which he said exemplified the solidarity and friendship between Chinese and American people during the war against their common enemy. I accompanied Stevens during his visit to the Hump Monument in Kunming where he planted a tree to mark his China days. He gazed upon the high monument and hesitated to leave. I could feel the ecstasy Stevens felt when he visited the battlefields once again after so many years and his profound compassion towards China. He told me more than once along the tour that he would

never forget those years in China, and that he loved China and respected China. He would keep working to promote the understanding and friendship between Chinese and American people and to boost bilateral ties between the two countries. What Stevens did all those years testified that he honored his words.

Wu Bangguo appointed Sheng Huairen to accompany Stevens and his family all the way to their tour in China in June 2010. Stevens paid a visit to Nanjing Monument to the Aviator Martyrs to salute pilots who fell in China's Resistance War Against Japanese Invasion. He also visited

The words still ring in our ears. However Stevens had died during his last flight, leaving behind precious spiritual wealth, namely his love for peace and mutual respect, his spirit of cooperation for a win-win situation and his pursuit of harmony and common prosperity. The spirit has withstood the test of war. Both China and US need to preserve the spirit and take it to new heights, which will nurture the Sino-US friendship in years ahead and make it stronger. (Photos provided by Zhong Sheng, Yuan Ning and Li Linchuan) ■

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