

Congressional Delegation (CODEL) Weldon and Asia: A personal account

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I. Preliminary

From January 21st to 31st of 1997, Congressman Curt Weldon organized a bi-partisan congressional delegation (Codel) to China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The original plan of the trip was to go to four cities: Shanghai (where Congressman Weldon was to deliver the Lincoln Lecture at Fudan University), Beijing, Hong Kong and Taipei. However, due to aircraft trouble, in which we had to spend about 15 hours in Anchorage, the Shanghai part of the visit had to be cancelled. This was of course a real disappointment for the Codel, especially Congressman Weldon and me.

As is well known, Shanghai, since 1989, is undergoing an unimaginable economic transformation. Having it as the first stop would have given the Codel an exciting first impression of the new Orient. Fortunately, it turns out that President Yang of Fudan University, who has an invitation from President Clinton, will be in Washington D.C. this coming week. So Congressman Weldon and I have arranged to meet him in Washington D.C. then to reschedule the lecture.

In addition, because of the heavy demands on the schedule, the Codel was not able to have all possible meetings, in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. As it is, the Codel had 27 meetings, each lasting at least as long as an hour, and often much longer.

CODEL-Weldon, the formal name for the delegation, consisted of the following members:

Congressman Curt Weldon (R-Pennsylvania), Chairman of the delegation
Congressman Solomon Ortiz (D-Texas)
Congressman Jon Fox (R-Pennsylvania)
Congressman John McHugh (R-New York)
Congressman Matt Salmon (R-Arizona).

In Beijing, Codel-Weldon was joined by Congressman Gary Ackerman (D-New York) and in Taipei, by Congressman Michael R. McNulty (D-New York). (R=Republican and D=Democratic).

There were also a number of professional staff members from the House National Security Committee in the Codel. They are Steve Ansley, who handled much of the schedule logistics for the Codel, and David Trachtenberg, an expert on China and Russia affairs, who also prepared a many hundred pages notes for the Codel on aspects ranging from cultural to military of that region (within two weeks). It was, to say the least, an impressive document! The Chief-of-Staff of Congressman Salmon, Robert U. Glazier, was also with the Codel until Hong Kong.

There were also five members of the military who accompanied the Codel. Colonel Daniel E. Fleming and Lieutenant Colonel Mark Wise were both army escorts. They were there to handle the travel logistics as well as other military matters. Colonel (Dr.) Al Nagia from the air force was the Codel medical doctor. Judging from what I saw he was carrying, I think Dr. Nagia must have sufficient medicine and equipment to handle the most complicated medical problem if it were to arise! Finally, two other army escorts, Sargent First Class Gary Hardy and Staff Sargent Edward LaRosa, were there throughout the trip to handle all other needs of the Codel. It was interesting for me to learn that both Sergeants belong to the elite honor guards of the Army, and just two weeks ago, they performed their duties during the inauguration ceremony of President Clinton!

Finally, there were also two "civilians" on this trip: Dr. Gerrit W. Gong, who is the Freeman Chair in China Studies and Director of Asian Studies Program of a well known think-tank in Washington D.C. known as the Center for Strategic and International Studies. From what I was told, and from what I observed, Gerrit was obviously an intellectual of significant proportion in this important field of study. He had, I was told, testified repeatedly in the Congressional hearings on East Asia policies. I was the other civilian, unofficially representing the academic world. My presence was of course supported by the President of Drexel University, President Constantine Papadakis. Both Dr. Gong and I were invited by Congressman Weldon to be a part of this Codel.

II. Why the trip?

Every event and every meeting will be reported by David Trachtenberg, the professional staff member of the House National Security Committee. The report he is currently preparing will be part of the Congressional records and therefore part of the report is available to the public. David promised me that when it is available, he will let me know when and where one can get a copy.

I would like to take a few paragraphs here to recapture my own feelings and impressions of this trip.

Let me say from the outset that we have often heard from the media that many of the trips taken by congressmen are "junkets", namely they are more (or all) sight-seeing and partying and less (or no) work. Undoubtedly, junkets do occur from time to time. However, I must confess that if Codel-Weldon was a junket, than I certainly would pity those who would be going to one which is not a junket!

The purpose of Codel-Weldon is very surgical. East Asia, especially China - Hong Kong - Taiwan, are becoming increasingly important for the United States, since the United States is now the ONLY "western" Pacific power, technologically, industrially, business-wise and last but not least, militarily in the region. Increasingly our business and industrial activities are linked to that region, there is a great deal of technology transfer back and forth between the two regions, our industry is setting up joint-ventures there. Politically, there are several potential flash-points in the Orient, such as the Taiwan Straits, which if hostility is initiated, will surely involve the United States

in one way or another. For example, a year ago, events at Taiwan Straits caused President Clinton to direct the presence of two aircraft carriers to the region, a command which very few recent US presidents had to do. Personally I could not recall any since the days of the Quemoy-Matsu incident in the late 50's!

It is my opinion that once a person is elected to be the Congressional representation from a region, he/she is one of the 430 members of our national leadership. To carry out his/her job effectively, he/she must not only be fully aware of the parameters of the regional concerns, but national as well as international ones as well. In this vain, if all our elected congressmen are as hard working and as astute as those on this Codel about regional, national and international affairs, and how serious they approach such problems, then we as citizens are in good hands! For example, in whatever manner a congressman would vote on the issue of MFN for China, we as citizens would certainly want him/her to have the best interest of the United States at heart, and to do so could only come from a complete understanding of all aspects of the MFN issue.

When I was a young boy in Singapore, I read a book entitled "the Ugly American" which depicted the incompetence of the United States diplomats in the world. Again, if the US foreign service personnel are anything like those we met on this Codel, then what was described in the book was probably something of the past, if it ever was true! Indeed, the diplomats we met on this trip, from our Ambassador or military attaché in Beijing to the General Affairs Officer in Taipei, they are all highly trained, exceedingly hard-working and usually bilingual professionals. The briefings in the Embassies, Consulate and the American Institute in Taiwan (since US and Taiwan have no formal relationships, a non-profit institute was set up to run the day-to-day business between the two countries) were succinct and concise! They certainly demonstrated that the personnels do know the local situation and people well.

From what I can surmise, Codel-Weldon had the following purposes:

1. Bring to the table a proposal for the Chinese People's Congress a direct mechanism to contact with the United States Congress. It turns out that virtually all substantial contacts between China and the United States were through the Administrative branch of the Government, and inadequate contacts between the respective legislative branches. However, increasingly the United States Congress has to deal with many Chinese issues, such as the "annual" MFN votes or to vote on providing Lee Teng-Hui's a private citizen visa to visit his alma mater Cornell University. In addition, there are trade, military and other issues relating to bi-lateral relationship which require in-depth understanding of the situation by the Congress in order to protect U.S. interests. Although the Chinese People's Congress is not parallel in stature and power as the US Congress, it is gaining in importance in recent years.
2. To initiate a dialogue with the Chinese on how to transfer "cold war" hardwares for non-military purposes, especially in the realm of

environmental protection (which for China, this is a very serious concern),

3. To see first hand what is happening in Hong Kong five months prior to the transfer of power (from United Kingdom to China).
4. To understand the concerns and aspirations of the Government in Taiwan.

III. What did we do there?

The following is a complete listing of all the meetings we had on this trip. Most meetings were two hours long!

Meetings in Beijing

1. Briefing by the United States Embassy (Ambassador Sasser chaired)
2. Meeting with the Host: China People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (PIFA)
3. Working lunch with CPIFA
4. Meeting with the National Environmental Protection Agency
5. Meeting and Dinner with the National People's Congress Foreign Affairs Committee (Chairman Zhu Liang chaired)
6. Meeting with the Ministry of Defense (Lt. General Xiong Guangkai chaired)
7. Meeting with National Defense University (Major General Pan Zhengqiang)
8. State Dinner with State Council Foreign Affairs Director Liu Huaqiu
9. Dinner with US business leaders (IBM, Boeing, Motorola etc)
10. Working breakfast with the American Chamber of Commerce in Beijing.
11. Working lunch at Ambassador Sasser's residence with the Think Tankers Scholars in Beijing regarding strategic matters.
12. Meeting with the Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation Minister.
13. Meeting with the Staff Members of the Institute of Coal Mining Research.
14. Meeting with State Science and Technology Commission
(Chaired by international cooperation bureau deputy director Sun Wanhu)
15. Meeting with China Center for Adoption Affairs (meeting chaired by Director Guo Sijian)
16. An hour meeting with the Prime Minister, Li Peng

Meetings in Hong Kong

17. Briefing by Consulate General Richard Boucher
18. Meeting with the Vision 2047
19. Meeting with American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong

(Due to our delayed arrival, meetings with the Chief executive-designate Tung Chee-Hwa and governor Patten were cancelled)

Meetings in Taipei

20. Briefing at the American Institute in Taiwan
(Chaired by Chrisopher Lafleur, Deputy Director of AIT)
21. Meeting with Taipei's city council
22. Meeting with the New Party members of the Taiwan City Council
23. Working dinner with Taiwan's Business people
24. Briefing by the Ministry of Defense (General Tang chaired)
25. Meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff
26. Meeting with the Defense Minister
27. Meeting with President Lee Teng-Hui
28. Meeting with Prime Minister Lien Chen
29. Working dinner with Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Epilogue

There is an old Chinese saying: Gan-Kai-Wan-Qian (having a thousand to ten thousand feelings)! I certainly felt that way when I got home and saw my family, after such a whirlwind trip. The best way for me to summarize this report is to give the final anecdote:

Our plane landed in Andrews Airforce base near Washington D.C. As Congressman Weldon and his wife Mary drove home to Philadelphia (they were kind enough to give me a ride home), a bit of "reality" sets in for me since Congressman Weldon's primary concern in that two hour drive was to be able to get to his son's hockey game in West Chester. When we arrived at the game at half time, he was visibly relief! This in itself had some built in humor. After all, some 18 hours earlier, Codel Weldon were driven to the airport by a police escort in Taipei, and was given a high honor sent off by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Taiwan. Along the way back, there was a special briefing at Yokuda Airforce Base (near Tokyo), and the Codel was met by all the top brass there. Then at Elmendorf Airforce Base in Alaska, there was a change of crew. During that short stop over, at 4:30 am and -15 degrees below zero (F), we met the Base commander there as well. Therefore it was good to know that when the Congressman got home, attending his son's hockey game was his top priority!

Useful URL's for this report

<http://www.ccri.ac.cn/>
<http://www.redfish.com/USEmbassy-China/frames.htm>
http://www.usia.gov/posts/hong_kong.html
<http://www.amcham.org.hk/home.html>
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