

Opening Remarks

By

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Chairman

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hearing

“Hong Kong After the Elections: The Future of One Country Two Systems”

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We convene the CECC today to examine the progress and prospects of constitutional development in Hong Kong. Nothing could be more timely, given the Legislative Council elections that just concluded on September 12. Whether the 21st Century is peaceful and prosperous will depend on whether China can live with itself and become open to the world in a fair and respectful manner. Hong Kong is central to that possibility. As such, Hong Kong’s affairs and people deserve our greatest attention, respect, and good will.

America and China both have enormous vested interests in the success of the “one country, two systems” model in Hong Kong. From a Congressional perspective, it seems self-evident that advancing constitutional reform—including universal suffrage—would contribute to the city’s political stability and economic prosperity. In that light, the September 12 elections had both good and bad news: while a record number of Hong Kong’s voters turned out and voted heavily for candidates favoring continued reform, the bad news is that the process was constrained by rules under which the Hong Kong people could not enjoy full democratic autonomy. Hence, we

continue to be concerned that while recent decisions by Beijing that set limits on constitutional development in Hong Kong implicitly acknowledged a degree of autonomy for Hong Kong, they do not represent a forthright commitment to the “high” degree of autonomy that was promised by the central authorities in the 1982 Joint Declaration and the Basic Law.

Few places on the planet are better prepared for democratic governance than Hong Kong. In the LegCo elections earlier this month, in which record numbers voted, the people of Hong Kong again made plain their aspirations for greater democratic autonomy, aspirations fully within the framework of the “one country, two systems” formula. They previously had shown their keen interest in participatory democracy when they turned out in record numbers for District Council elections last November. Yet the way forward is now somewhat murky; no one is certain what will happen after 2007. The central PRC government says that it maintains a commitment to universal suffrage and direct election of the chief executive and LegCo, as contemplated by the Joint Declaration and Basic Law. But without a timetable, the fullness of this commitment lacks clarity and instills uncertainty. We must all acknowledge that the recent election is a step forward, but democratic frustration continues to build because there is simply no credible reason to thwart the pace of democratic transformation in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong is important unto itself; it is also a model for others. What happens there is watched particularly closely by Taiwan. In a globalized world where peoples everywhere are seeking a sense of community to serve as a buttress against political and economic forces beyond the control of individuals and their families, it is next to impossible to reconcile political systems based on unlike institutions and attitudes. Mutual respect for differences is the key to peace and prosperity in a world in which history suggests conflict has been a generational norm.

To help us understand what has just transpired in the Hong Kong elections, and how it might affect the progress of constitutional development, we turn to our witnesses this morning.

Randy Schriver joins us from the East Asia bureau at the State Department, to give the U.S. government's perspective, and we have a distinguished panel of private experts who will share their expertise with us a bit later.