

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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### **From Boston to Taipei, Taiwan**

It all started with a call to my office from an official at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Boston. She invited me to join a Massachusetts legislative delegation on a visit to Taiwan. I was intrigued by the invitation, so I checked out the organization, the trip and participants.

Here's what I learned about the venture. I found that the Office serves as the Taiwanese consulate for New England. The U.S. does not have state-to-state relations Taiwan, so no embassy or consulate exists in either country. The invitation came from the equivalent of our State Department for the purpose of promoting better understanding between our states. The trip is an annual event, generally extended to legislative leaders from the New England states, though this year it is limited to Massachusetts lawmakers – five senators and six house members.

I felt honored to be invited. It sounded like a great opportunity, and the house is not in session while new bills are getting classified. So I signed on and started learning some Chinese phrases.

Sen. Stan Rosenberg led the group and Sen. Gale Candaras and I were the other two Western Massachusetts participants. We flew from Boston via Los Angeles to Taipei, leaving on a Wednesday morning and arriving Thursday evening, with 24 hours in transit. The extra half-day comes from the 13-hour time difference.

Friday morning we began a series of meeting with government officials, from agricultural to biotech to health to security. Here are some of the highlights of our meetings.

All of the agency leaders spoke English well, and many had earned advanced degrees from American universities. The mayor of Taipei received a doctorate in biotechnology from UMass. He was nostalgic about weekends in Springfield and even had friends from Longmeadow. One fluent English-speaker, however, had never been here. He attributed his skill to the hours he had spent watching American movies.

The health insurance officials were much more excited by the new Massachusetts health insurance plan than their task of informing us about their own universal coverage system.

Taiwan's isolation in the world was a theme that ran through many meetings. Its 23 million people live so close to China, home to 1.3 billion. China claims sovereignty over Taiwan and is a constant threat, though commercial ties between the two states are substantial and increasing. When we made the mistake of handing a "made in China" gift to an official, he laughed and said the factory was probably owned by Taiwanese.

The people are proud of their newly democratic government. Taiwan had its first transfer of power to the longtime opposition party a few years ago, and both the president and vice president served jail time for earlier anti-government activities. A sign of that democracy came with the breaking story that the new government wants to downplay tributes to Chiang Kai-shek by removing his statue from military bases and eliminating the ceremonial military guards at his memorial.

Pauline Chen, the Boston consular official who accompanied the delegation, scheduled some time for sightseeing, so we were able to visit a Confucian temple, see the wonders of ancient art at the Palace Museum, and observe the city from the tallest building in the world, Taipei 101.

We returned home energized and educated, even if we were exhausted by again traveling halfway around the world, home to Massachusetts.