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Article Celebrating Premier Y.S. Sun's 80th Birthday

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Premier Y. S. Sun is an exceptional person who has made outstanding contributions to his country, both domestically and in its relations with other countries. On the happy occasion of his 80th birthday, which I join in celebrating with special affection, we should recognize that Premier Sun's contributions are found not only in his outstanding achievements but also in the very special kind of person that he is.

Premier Sun represents the qualities which Americans so admire in the Chinese people, including personal integrity, great intelligence, devotion to family, and the understanding that hard work and education are indispensable to progress. He respects the great traditions and values of China's past but has sought a better future for his country. In his distinguished career of public service, Premier Sun always had a dream, but he was never merely a dreamer. He was a practical-minded leader who knew how to get things done. He worked hard for his country, and he inspired others to do the same. His policies as Minister of Economic Affairs and as Premier contributed enormously to Taiwan's "economic miracle" .

While so many people looked up to Premier Sun, his primary interest never seemed to be himself, but, rather, his family, his Friends and his country. His kindness and thoughtfulness toward other people is legendary. Among his thousands of friends, each probably has a personal story of how Premier Sun's kindness touched their lives. Because I have had the privilege of knowing him for more than 15 years, there are many examples I can remember. One of the most vivid is the day my wife and I were married in 1989. We had chosen to get married in a beautiful but remote chapel on a steep Part of Yangmingshan, and a typhoon hit Taipei with rain showers that day. Notwithstanding the difficult location and the typhoon, there in the church in his wheelchair was Premier Sun. My wife and I were deeply touched, and we will never forget his thoughtfulness.

Premier Sun has been a true friend of the United States throughout his career, and the American people have great respect for him. Destiny placed Premier Sun in the premiership of the Republic of China when the United States terminated official diplomatic relations. President Jimmy Carter made the announcement on December 16, 1978, and it became effective two weeks later on January 1, 1979. This action was handled badly by the Carter administration. Even though almost everyone knew that the United States would eventually have to deal with Beijing as the government of mainland China, the manner in which the decision was announced and implemented by

the Carter administration was appalling--particularly to me, as a Democrat who had voted for Carter. Fortunately, for the U.S.-Taiwan relationship, the Republic of China on Taiwan was blessed with much wiser leadership in the persons of Premier Y.S. Sun and President Chiang Ching-Kuo. They recognized that the friendship between the American people and the Chinese people on Taiwan was too strong to be destroyed by the inept way in which President Carter and his State Department handled the change in formal relations. Premier Sun and President Chiang were rightly offended by the actions of the Carter administration, but they handled the situation extremely well and were particularly magnanimous toward American citizens living in Taiwan.

I was elected President of Taipei's American Chamber of Commerce only a few days before President Carter's announcement, and my term of office was scheduled to commence on January 1, 1979, the same date on which the break in formal relations would become effective. There was outrage among Americans in Taiwan (and in the U.S.) at the way the United States government had treated Taiwan, but the outgoing President of the American Chamber of Commerce did not want to deal with the urgent issues the situation presented. When I insisted that we had to act and did not have a single day to lose, he asked me to take over the American Chamber of Commerce immediately as "President-elect". Thus, approximately two weeks before my term of office actually began, I started leading the American Chamber of Commerce's response to the crisis. The most important thing I did during this period was to seek the help of Premier Y. S. Sun.

On December 27, 1978, a group of other Americans and I met with Premier Sun at his office in the Executive Yuan. Premier Sun received us courteously and warmly, and he listened carefully to the requests we made. I told him I had found the American business community in Taiwan had relied for too long on the U.S. military's facilities and that new institutions had to be created at once to replace them. We asked Premier Sun to approve proposals to provide for continuation of the Taipei American School, the establishment of ICRT, relocation of the American Club, and the establishment of a program of youth activities for foreign children in Taiwan. Premier Sun promised to consider these requests and to act on them quickly. He kept his promise. All of these proposals were approved in principle within three weeks, and Premier Sun assigned responsibility to officials such as James Soong, then Director-General of the Government Information Office, and Frederick Chien, then Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, to oversee their implementation. In an unforgettable speech, Premier Sun announced these decisions publicly at the annual Hsieh-Nien-Fan of the American Chamber of Commerce in January 1979. For every American who was present on that occasion, Premier Sun will always be the personification of U.S.-Taiwan friendship.

In the meantime, of course, the architecture of a newer relationship between the U.S. and Taiwan had to be established. There was no precedent, because the United States had never before in its history broken relations with a friendly country. Premier Sun and I discussed these issues at length on several occasions. When the Carter administration announced its proposed legislation to govern U.S.-Taiwan relations, it was immediately clear that the proposal was inadequate. I testified in Washington before the U.S. Congress on behalf of the American Chamber of Commerce. I recommended changes in the proposed legislation which would meet the principles Premier Sun and I had agreed were essential. As Premier Sun told me, there must continue to be close, stable and secure relations between the U.S. and Taiwan. The substance should be unchanged, he said, even though the form would be different.

The U.S. Congress was angry over President Carter's handling of this momentous decision, and its members were impressed by the dignity, practicality and friendship of the responses from Premier Sun and President Chiang. Congress completely rewrote the legislation proposed by President Carter, passing the Taiwan Relations Act by such an overwhelming majority that President Carter could not veto it. I remember one Senator telling me that he only had to look at Premier Sun's face and at the face of the Premier of the People's Republic of China to know who was America's real friend and which man could be trusted. There is no question that the character of my cherished friend Y.S. Sun, as well as his policies, decisively influenced U.S.-ROC relations at that crucial moment in history.