The International Program – People’s Republic of China

A meeting with a member of Judicial Watch’s staff was requested by a representative of the US-China Business Training Center, headquartered in Los Angeles, California. The Center was hosting a delegation of Chinese business officials who worked in various oversight and supervisory roles in their provinces to combat corruption. They were interested in learning about Judicial Watch’s activities and its methods of government oversight as a non-profit organization that worked independent of the government.

The U.S. Department of State’s country profile reports that “the United States welcomes a strong, peaceful, and prosperous China playing a greater role in world affairs and seeks to advance practical cooperation with China in order to build a partnership based on mutual benefit and mutual respect.” Further, the country profile indicates that “the United States has emphasized the need to enhance bilateral trust through increased high-level exchanges, formal dialogues, and expanded people-to-people ties. The U.S. approach to China is an integral part of reinvigorated U.S. engagement with the Asia-Pacific region.” One of the principal areas of trust building is “advancing the rule of law and human rights” and “U. S. support for transparency and governance.”

The profile also discusses economic relations with China and states that “the United States seeks to fully integrate China into the global, rules-based economic and trading system.” This has led to a significant increase in trade, which has “grown from $33 billion in 1992 to over $536 billion in goods in 2012.” And, significantly, “The United States is China’s largest export market” today.

As set forth in its Mission Statement, “through its educational endeavors, Judicial Watch advocates high standards of ethics and morality in our nation’s public life and seeks to ensure that political and judicial officials do not abuse the powers entrusted to them by the American people. Judicial Watch fulfills its educational mission through litigation, investigations, and public outreach.” The International Program is an integral part of its educational program.
Judicial Watch president Tom Fitton, and fundraising staff member, Chenelyn Barker, met with the Chinese delegation at its headquarters in Washington, DC, on December 10, 2013.

Mr. Fitton discussed Judicial Watch’s structure as a non-profit, non-partisan organization that is supported largely by the donations of individual American citizens who believe in its mission to promote ethics and transparency in government. It receives monetary support from individuals, as well as foundations, in response to Judicial Watch’s efforts to inform and educate the public through various venues, including monthly newsletters, weekly Internet updates, educational panels, press releases, and major media TV and radio coverage.

President Fitton then provided the delegates with an overview of Judicial Watch’s investigations and research, legal, and media departments that work in unison to bring the results of its investigative work into the public domain. As such, the visitors were introduced to the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)—the primary tool used by Judicial Watch to uncover government corruption. Working closely with research and investigative staff, Mr. Fitton told the visitors that the legal team serves as an enforcement mechanism, filing lawsuits against those agencies that refuse or fail to respond to its information requests within the statutory deadline provided by FOIA law. This is what sets Judicial Watch apart from other public interest organizations in the nation’s capital. Not only does JW educate the public, but it uses the rule of law to uphold the public’s right to know about the inner workings of their government and their elected officials. Finally, Mr. Fitton said, JW’s media department interacts with major news sources, who publicize its findings through print and on-line media and through radio and TV interviews.

The Freedom of Information Act was signed into law in 1966, less than 40 years ago. Judicial Watch has to date been a practitioner of FOIA law for 20 years—since the time of its incorporation in 1994. The president then told the guests that anyone, including a foreign citizen can file a request for federal agency records. However, it takes an organization with the determination and the ability to stay the course, coupled with a smart investigative and legal staff—and hundreds of thousands of supporters across the country—to become a force to be reckoned with as it carries out its mission to promote transparency and openness in government.