

Even though former senator James Sasser said he hoped China would not carry out its threat to abolish Legco, his remarks at this sensitive time are certain to be viewed with alarm.

Until now, successive administrations have lent strong support to widening the democratic franchise in the territory. Governor Chris Patten was praised for his brave stand in going ahead with his reforms in the face of violent opposition from Beijing, Democratic Party leader Martin Lee Chu-ming was recently feted in the U.S. and awarded the American Bar Association Human Rights Award.

But speaking at his Senate confirmation hearing late last night, Mr. Sasser said: "Governor Patten has sought to 'enlarge it' [the 1984 Joint Declaration] to some extent by his encouragement of the democratic movement in Hong Kong.

"The Chinese have indicated that they are not going to abide by this democratic election of legislative councillors, and clearly by the covenant of 1984, they are not required to. But I am hopeful they will reconsider that."

His comments appeared to conflict with the passion in the US for supporting the continuation of Hong Kong's rights and freedoms after 1997.

In June, senators joined senior officials in declaring US determination to stay deeply involved in the future of the territory.

China came under fire from all sides for blocking the Court of Final Appeal and for vowing to dismantle the Legislative Council.

Assistant Secretary of State Winslow Lord said the Legco issue had caused great concern to Washington and warned that apparent moves by China to put pressure on civil servants were "making many in the career rank uncomfortable at a time when Beijing should instead be reassuring them".

Former US attorney-general Dick Thornburgh said China "has signalled its intention to renege on virtually all of the guarantees it made to preserve Hong Kong's legal system and the rule of law".

He said he was troubled by the lack of attention that Hong Kong and its people were receiving despite the gravity of the developments taking place in the territory.

Beijing has warned Britain not to "internationalise" the Hong Kong issue and the US not to interfere in China's internal affairs.

Foreign Relations Committee chairman Senator Jesse Helms, a staunch critic of China, promised to "expedite" Mr. Sasser's confirmation for the Beijing job.

A vote could come within one week at which Mr. Sasser is expected to be easily confirmed.

Mr. Sasser vowed to push for human rights improvements in China, stick firmly to the United States' one-China policy and promote US trade with Beijing.

Mr. Sasser told senators: "Some people say China needs us more than we need China. The reality is that China and the United States need each other."

Asked by several senators how he would handle Tibet and other human rights issues, he replied: "I intend at every appropriate occasion and on occasions when it might not seem appropriate to make the views of the administration known in this regard.

"The American people expect the Chinese Government to respect the human rights of its own citizens."

The White House made a symbolic gesture of support for its nominee, by sending Vice-President Al Gore to urge the committee to support Mr. Sasser, whom he described "a man of stature, wisdom and authority".

Mr. Sasser, who when he was a senator voted six times to link China's trading sta-

tus to human rights, said he had changed his mind and now believed that trading with China was the best way to encourage freedom and democracy in that country.

On Taiwan, he defended the administration's one-China policy.

If he is confirmed before October 24, Mr. Sasser said he hoped to take part in the summit meeting in New York between presidents Jiang Zemin and Bill Clinton.

The only question as to Mr. Sasser's competence in the job was raised by Senator Craig Thomas, who pointed out that the past five ambassadors were career diplomats with much China experience, and not political appointees like Mr. Sasser.

However, Mr. Sasser, a Democrat who lost his Senate seat last year, said he had spent recent months studying Chinese language and politics at Harvard University and the Foreign Service Institute.

Mr. HELMS. I thank the Chair. I apologize for keeping the Senate in session a little bit longer than would otherwise have been the case.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HELMS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### THE LIBERTAD BILL

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, first I would like to commend the Presiding Officer, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, for the attention and dedication to the legislation that is pending before the Senate, the Libertad bill which deals with the notorious dictator and the oppression that has occurred for over three decades over the people in Cuba, and for your attempts to address those vital issues.

As you know, Mr. President, I spoke on that yesterday in support of your effort with particular emphasis on the abrogation of property rights. This has been something that has bothered me, not only in Cuba but in Nicaragua and other countries in the hemisphere, and I think the President is doing exemplary service, not only for our citizens, but citizens around the world in confronting the issue of the confiscation of property in our world today, and without compensation and without appropriate redress.

So I compliment the Chair.

#### THE FISCAL AFFAIRS OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I also appreciate your accepting the duty of presiding so that I might make a comment or two about a number of the speeches that have been made as amendments and commentary at the time of discussing your bill that had nothing whatsoever to do with your bill.

From the other side of the aisle, we have heard repeatedly criticism of the efforts of the new majority to take charge of the fiscal affairs of the United States, even though the vast majority of the American people sent this new majority here to do just that. They have rejected the status quo. They have rejected the concept of spending money we do not have. They have rejected the prospect of robbing the future of its opportunity because there are no resources left. They have rejected the idea that this Nation not stumble into the next century 5 years from now. Yet, all we hear is the same song sheet—leave everything the way it is, and reject the pleas of the American people to take charge of our own financial house.

I tell you. It is mind-boggling.

We have said there are four things that must happen. We must balance our budgets. Eighty-eight percent of the American people say we must balance our budget. Are we deaf? They want the budget balanced, and for good reason. They have to balance their own checkbooks. They have to balance the checkbooks of their businesses. And they know nations have to do the same thing.

I was reading in the bipartisan entitlement commission report just the other day where it said—and it ought to be a loud wake-up call for every American, and certainly for the President and for every American policymaker. It says this: It says that within 10 years—that is a snap of a finger—within 10 years all U.S. resources will be exhausted by just five programs. Just five—Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, Federal retirement, and the interest on our debt. And there is nothing left. We will not be debating a B-2 bomber. There will not be one, nor anything else to defend the Nation, nor a school lunch program nor a Transportation Department nor a Commerce Department nor any of them. No American, no Member of this Senate, not a person who has abused their financial affairs can carry out their mission—not a person, not a family, not a business, not a community and yes, Mr. President, not even nations. No generation of Americans has ever given the future a country crippled. But we are perilously close to doing just that.

Mr. President, we have said we must balance our budgets so that we quit adding debt. We have said we want to save Medicare because the trustees have said it is going bankrupt, and we want to protect it and preserve it. And we want to save \$270 billion, not for a tax increase, but by law to keep it in the Medicare Trust Fund so that its solvency is pushed out years from now so that it does not go bankrupt, so that the current beneficiaries will not have the program closed, and, importantly, so the beneficiaries to come will have it in place.

We said welfare as it is known must come to an end. You would be hard pressed to find a single citizen in this