

Senator Supports Taiwan for Pacific Trade Deal

Welcome back to As It Is from VOA Learning English! I'm Mario Ritter. Today, we hear about a program in New York City that gives young people a chance to help others and learn what service means.

"It meant a lot because it changed the way I see life and now I see people."

But first, we look across the Pacific Ocean to East Asia. The United States continues to develop its ties to Asian and Pacific countries. Today we hear a report from Ralph Jennings in Taiwan. He is following an American senator who recently met with business leaders in Taiwan's capital, Taipei. The lawmaker hopes to create close economic ties with the island, which is both strong economically and has a democratic system of government.

Senator Supports Taiwan for the Trans-Pacific Partnership

Robert Menendez of New Jersey has been in the United States Senate since 2006. Mr. Menendez is the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He believes the United States should negotiate an investment deal with Taiwan. Such an agreement, he says, would let the island join the Trans-Pacific Partnership, an American-led free trade alliance.

Taiwan also wants closer trade and investment ties with the United States. The island's economic success is strongly dependent on exports to both sides of the Pacific Ocean.

Senator Menendez spoke about the investment deal during a speech last week to the American Chamber of Commerce in Taipei. He also expressed support for Taiwan's entry into the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP. But he said that would have to include an agreement on many issues.

The TPP is an agreement being negotiated to link 12 countries around the Pacific Ocean. They include Japan, Vietnam, Australia, Mexico and the United States. The agreement is aimed at creating a free trade deal covering many issues affecting imports and exports. President Obama has said the TPP could be a model not only for East Asia and the Pacific, but for future trade agreements in other areas.

The group does not currently include China, which opposes Taiwan's joining international organizations. China considers Taiwan a rebel province and has not ruled out using force to unite the two sides.

Earlier this year, Senator Menendez supported a bill that requires the State Department to seek Taiwan's observer status in the International Civil Aviation Organization. China opposes such a move. That bill passed Congress in June.

China and the United States were opponents during the middle of the 20th century. The two countries still compete for influence in East Asia. Both Taiwan and the United States are hoping to improve relations with China, East Asia's largest economy. The American effort to strengthen diplomatic and military ties in Asia is known as the pivot to Asia. Senator Menendez says the move is not directed against China. He says it stresses economic relationships.

"A constructive and strategic American engagement in Asia is in the interest of all nations in the region, especially if we create ways to institutionalize cooperation and manage competition, creating a rules-based order for the Asia-Pacific region."

Senator Menendez is a member of the Democratic Party. He is on his first trip to Asia as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The trip included visits to South Korea and China, and ends on the twenty-first.

Teens Learn About Service and Get a Second Chance

Hurricane Sandy struck the eastern United States last October. The hurricane caused flooding and damage from high winds. More than 100 people died as a result of the storm. Today some victims of Sandy are still having problems. However, there is an army of helpers that have joined the recovery effort. They are young people who are getting a second chance. June Simms has more.

Young people help clear a road damaged by Hurricane Sandy at Breezy Point, New York. When the work is finished, government vehicles will again be able to get to the coast to take care of wildlife.

Other teenagers are preparing food packages for victims of Hurricane Sandy. These helpers are from New York City. They were found guilty of non-violent crimes and are now on probation -- a period of supervision instead of time in jail for former lawbreakers.

The young people are receiving help from a non-profit group called YouthWRAP. It helps teenage lawbreakers reject crime through community projects.

Vincent Schiraldi is New York City's Probation Commissioner. He says the young people and the city get something valuable out of the program.

"The more time they spend doing good, the less time they are going to spend doing bad as far as we are concerned. So part of it is for them to turn their lives around, part of it is for them to really do the work that New York City needs to recover from Sandy."

Not far away, Coney Island's Salt and Sea Mission is working with YouthWrap. The group is giving other young offenders the chance to do something good. The Mission takes care of individuals whose homes were destroyed.

"Today we are giving out green beans, macaroni and cheese, diced tomatoes, apple sauce, apple juice, pesto beans, no kidney beans, and maple and the peanut butter."

The teenagers are paid up to \$1400 dollars for the summer. But even more important is the responsibility and experience that these young people gain. "It meant a lot because it changed the way I see life and now I see people."

Pastor Debby Santiago is the leader of the Salt and Sea Mission. She was once a drug dealer and bank robber. But now the city's Probation Department wants her to provide guidance to the young people.

"They're helping this community, most of them, I mean they're getting pleasure out of helping other people."

Hurricane Sandy recovery projects in New York City involve about 450 teens on probation. And many of them are on their way to a better life.
I'm June Simms.

On This Date: Hawaii Becomes a State

On August 21st, 1959, President Dwight Eisenhower signed an order admitting the islands of Hawaii as America's 50th state. The island chain is in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, over 3,800 kilometers from the coast of California. Hawaii has a warm, tropical climate unlike anything in the other 49 states. It also was once the home of one very famous American, President Barack Obama.

We hope you enjoyed our show today. Listen again tomorrow more stories about the United States and the world on As It Is.