



**August 2, 2007**

## **Returning from Red China**

Hello friends,

Last month, nine other senators, several state representatives, hundreds of educators, and I flew to China for a nine-day visit to study the possible adoption of Chinese as a language taught in our schools. I paid about \$750 for travel to and from China, and Hanban (the executive body of the Chinese Language Council International) paid the rest. While studying the Chinese educational system was the primary reason Hanban invited the 1,000-member delegation, I also wanted to discover the positives and negatives of what was happening in the Communist land.

Communication with the Chinese people wasn't a problem since so many individuals in the areas we visited could speak English, but **what impressed me most was what I saw, not the "official line" that one usually hears.**

We were treated very well and visited all the usual tourist spots, such as the Forbidden City, the Great Wall (I climbed to the top!) and Tiananmen Square. We also had a formal lunch at the Great Hall of the People, where **I was invited to dine at the same table where President Richard Nixon sat during his historic trip to China 35 years ago.**



Young Chinese performers in Beijing dance for the delegation outside their elementary school.

Air pollution and fast, uncontrolled growth during the last five years (fueled by all the products we buy from them) have made Beijing, our first stop, very congested. Late-model luxury cars cram the highways, driving conditions are deplorable and tall skyscrapers are being constructed everywhere. On a 'sunny' day, you can't see the tops of tall buildings more than a half mile away and the sun looks like a fuzzy ball through the smoke.

The countryside is more what you would expect, especially at our second stop in Yunnan Province, which is 1,400 miles to the south of Beijing and just north of Vietnam. In its capital city of Kunming, the temperature was only 80 degrees instead of nearly 100 degrees like in Beijing, and it is a much greener, cleaner and clearer city. It reminded me of Northern California with the palm trees and numerous beautiful flowers.

The underbelly of China is visible if you look for it. I noticed MiG fighters parked at civilian airports and little children begging in the streets at two in the morning. **I was always looking for the odd or unusual, such as highways being built by thousands of workers with small cement mixers, shovels, and wheelbarrows.** There appeared to be no shortage of cheap labor, but power equipment is another story.



A young Chinese student speaks with Sen. Carrell inside a classroom in Kunming City, capitol of Yunnan province.

I was quite amazed at the differences between the American educational system and the Chinese educational system. China's educational system clearly shows that learning is more about good teachers and willing students than about how much money is thrown into it. The Chinese seem to get a lot more learning with less. And to me, it seems to be a matter of motivation.

I was surprised to see the Chinese using something we stopped using here in the U.S. in the

name of helping kids develop higher self-esteem. **In China, outside the principal's office, they post the daily grades of every high school student.** I think that would be a pretty good motivator to excel. It would appear that the Chinese believe the best way of boosting self-esteem is academic achievement. I noticed at Beijing University, they assign dorms based on a student's grades. The better the grades, the better dorm a student gets.

They also have a stark lack of educational materials in their classrooms. **The schools I visited had very little in the way of technology. In fact, some classrooms had no equipment at all.** There were no audio/video materials, pictures or even books. And believe me, as a former teacher, I was really looking for it.

It is also clear to me now why gas, concrete, and steel prices are climbing in the U.S. All the cars, building and road construction going on in China require energy, mostly in the form of oil, and that drives up the cost for all of us.

The good news for the Western world is that China now has more to lose than it did when they got involved in two wars with us in the 20th century. Because of my visit to China, **I now have a better understanding of the challenges that China is facing, as well as the challenges it presents to the United States.**

## In Closing

**Thank you all for allowing me the privilege of serving you in the Washington State Senate.** As always, please contact me using the information below if you have any comments, questions or concerns.

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Sincerely,



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