

\$80m bill for HK's lobbying in US

From SIMON BECK
in Washington

HONG Kong is the world's sixth largest spender on lobbying and public relations in the United States, with an outlay of nearly \$80 million last year, new figures show.

Although the territory spent far less than the top Washington lobbyist, Japan, whose outlay was a massive US\$60.4 million (HK\$467 million), it was the second biggest spender in Asia, according to figures in *The New York Times*.

A spokesman for the Hong Kong office in Washington said the amount included lobbying by private companies, including Hongkong Bank, Cathay Pacific and other firms with large interests in the US.

The spokesman confirmed the Hong Kong Government had spent \$1.5 million, and put the rest down to Hong Kong corporations.

The New York Times published the statistics, based on Justice Department filings, to reveal how much foreign entities would pay to acquire influence in the US capital's corridors of power.

The Justice Department requires companies representing all types of "foreign interests" - Governments and firms - to declare their work under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

According to the findings, the territory spent US\$10.5 million in 1992 to pay for lobbyists, legal advice, and other activities such as trade and economic promotion. Tourism promotion was not included in the sum.

The next highest Asian spender was Taiwan, coming in eighth at US\$8.31 million, followed by Aus-

tralia (ninth) with US\$8.31 million, Indonesia (11th) with US\$7.4 million, South Korea (22nd) with US\$2.7 million, and Singapore (25th) with US\$2.3 million.

Hong Kong outspent such economic giants as Britain, which laid out US\$6.8 million, and Italy with US\$2.1 million.

Japan's outlay was so huge that the nearest spender was Canada, a distant second on US\$22.7 million. Then came Germany, France and Mexico.

Mexico has come under fire in the US for spending millions on lobbying congressmen to pass the controversial North American Free Trade Agreement.

Legislative Councillors recently criticised the territory's outlay in the United States after a *Sunday Morning Post* article revealed that it spent US\$1.5 million to employ five legal and lobbying firms and a public relations company.

At the time of the article, Peter Lo Yat-fai, Minister at the Washington Economic and Trade Office, said the cost was justified because the Government had to monitor and get its message across on vital issues such as China's most favoured nation status, textile quotas and anti-dumping legislation.

China does not figure on *The New York Times* list.

It used to employ a public relations firm, but is now believed to be following a more behind the scenes, diplomatic approach to lobbying.

Hong Kong's new "ambassador" to the US, Barrie Wiggham, last night began his first promotional trip with a visit to San Francisco to meet local leaders. He could not be reached for comment.