

## Premier Wu brushes off US beef referendum

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Premier Wu Den-yih (吳登毅) yesterday rejected calls for a referendum on the government's relaxed beef policy, while Democratic Progressive Party Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) yesterday pledged support for one in an open letter.

In an interview with the UFO Network radio station, Wu said a referendum would be inappropriate and there was no good reason for one. There is a risk that the matter of US beef imports would become "tainted by populism," making a rational debate impossible, he said.

Civic groups have launched a petition to seek a referendum on whether the government should renegotiate its deal with the US.

Wu urged the public to trust in the Department of Health, the legislature's role as a supervisory body, standards of international trade negotiations and the safety standards set by the World Organization for Animal Health.

Taiwan cannot "resort to referendums" on all matters or "we will stumble in our footsteps," he said.

To stem the outcry over its beef policy, the government said on Monday that it would use administrative means to obstruct some imports.

"With the measures in place, there will be close to no chance of imports of ground beef and internal organs. For now we have only opened the market to one more US beef product — bone-in beef," Wu said.

Also yesterday, Wu told reporters at the Ministry of the Interior that the Executive Yuan would send its beef protocol to the legislature for its reference.

"The [Rules Governing the Processing of Treaties and Agreements, 總統府公布] stipulate that once a protocol is approved by the Executive Yuan and is thus effective, it is to be sent to the legislature for its reference. We have great respect for the legislature," he said.

His comment followed a statement by Executive Yuan Spokesman Su Jun-pin (蘇俊平) a day earlier that the protocol was effective without legislative review.

Tsai, meanwhile, said in her open letter that she would back the actions of civic groups seeking a referendum, including any demonstrations. Tsai called for bipartisan support on the matter.

Tsai said President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) was "against the people" and that it was arrogant of the government to relax its beef policy without consulting domestic health experts or first submitting the deal for legislative oversight.

"The government has put on a facade of protecting public health ... with these technical

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measures, but we see right through them,” Tsai said, referring to the administrative measures announced on Monday. “The government could change its regulations at any time because it lacks the expertise needed for inspections and easily caves in to US pressure.”

The measures involved thawing certain US beef imports for inspection, blocking them in effect by causing them to deteriorate during the inspection process.

Tsai said she feared a “lose-lose” situation for Taipei and Washington in which consumers lose confidence in both governments.

The best option would be either to renegotiate or to ban the controversial products through legislation, she said.

Meanwhile, Tainan County Commissioner Su Huan-chih (蘇煥章) told reporters yesterday that he had applied for a permit to hold a demonstration in Taipei this weekend, with Internet users urging the public to take to the streets on Sunday morning.

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