

US' Ted Yoho plugs WHA role

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US Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar speaks during healthcare pricing roundtable in the White House in Washington on Jan. 23.

Photo: Bloomberg

US Representative Ted Yoho on Friday sent a letter to US Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar, urging him to visit Taiwan next month to attend an international workshop on public health and advocate for Taiwan's participation in the upcoming World Health Assembly (WHA).

"I would like to bring to your attention the upcoming Global Cooperation and Training Framework [GCTF] meeting that Taiwan will be hosting from April 30 to May 3, 2019, in Taipei. I urge you to attend this important event," Yoho said in the letter.

This year's GCTF event, a joint Taiwan-US program established in 2015, is to be an international workshop on treatment guidelines for drug-resistant tuberculosis, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.

Through the GCTF, Taiwan and the US have conducted training programs for experts to combat Middle East respiratory syndrome, dengue fever and the Zika virus, Yoho said, urging the US not to undervalue Taiwan's financial and technical contributions to global health initiatives.

"Since 1996, Taiwan has invested over [US]\$6 billion in international medical and humanitarian aid efforts, impacting over 80 countries. In 2014, Taiwan responded to the Ebola crisis by donating [US]\$1 million and providing 100,000 sets of personal protective equipment," the Republican legislator said.

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Despite Taiwan's contributions, it has suffered "unnecessary exclusion" from international bodies that address health initiatives at the behest of China, particularly the WHO, which was why he introduced bill H.R.353 in the US House of Representatives to direct the US secretary of state to develop a strategy for helping Taiwan regain observer status at the WHA, Yoho said.

The bill was passed unanimously by the House on Jan. 22.

"While this bill has received support in Congress, I ask for your help in advocating for Taiwan's inclusion in the 2019 World Health Assembly meeting," Yoho said. "Diseases know no borders, and Taiwan's needless exclusion from global health cooperation increases the dangers presented by global pandemics."

The next WHA is to take place in Geneva, Switzerland, from May 20 to May 28. Taiwan participated in the WHA as an observer from 2009 to 2016, but has not received an invitation ever since due to pressure from China.

At last year's WHA, Azar expressed his disappointment at Taiwan's exclusion, saying that it was difficult to reconcile global concern over cross-border infectious diseases with the exclusion of Taiwan and its 23 million people from the gathering.

The ministry yesterday issued a news release thanking Yoho, the US Congress and the US government for their long-standing efforts to push for Taiwan's participation at health-related international events.

"We welcome more like-minded nations to join hands with Taiwan in safeguarding the health and security of the entire human race," the ministry said.

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