

Taiwan should support US' WHA bill

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US Representative Ted Yoho speaks at a panel discussion at a US government infrastructure event in Washington on Wednesday.

PHOTO: Bloomberg

US support for Taiwan to participate in next year's World Health Assembly (WHA) meeting as an observer must be met with supporting action by the Taiwanese government, former Ministry of Health and Welfare representative to Geneva Chang Wu-hsiu (張武修) said.

Chang's comments referred to the support of other subcommittee members regarding a bill introduced by US Representative Ted Yoho, who chairs the US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific. The bill was unanimously passed on Thursday.

The bill aims to improve the US strategy for promoting Taiwan's participation in the WHO, and instructs the US secretary of state to report on the US Department of State's efforts to obtain observer status for Taiwan at the WHA.

Yoho said international health concerns should not be limited to national borders, and it was unfortunate that China has taken a shortsighted view and barred Taiwan from participating in international organizations.

Public health should not become an issue of political football and the US should continue to support Taiwan's participation in the WHO, US Representative Gerald Connolly added.

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Chang said that alternative methods of medical and health cooperation between Taiwan and the US should be explored.

“There are too many things that could be done,” Chang said. “Opportunity must be backed up with action.”

With Taiwan's high standard of medical quality and wide healthcare coverage, it could cooperate with the US and other countries to make the nation more visible on the international stage, but such a commitment does not have to be centered around politics, Chang said.

Taiwan could offer medical training to other nations, develop a market for medical products, or even invest in hospitals abroad, expanding Taiwan's renown and capability through actual work, he added.

The government and private sectors must ensure that Taiwan is invited to the next WHA, Taipei-based Foundation of Medical Professionals Alliance executive director Lin Shih-chia (林錫琪) said.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs thanked the subcommittee for its support, saying that such action was in line with constant support from the US administrative and legal branches supporting the nation's participation in international organizations.

Support for the bill shows that support for Taiwan's participation in international organizations transcends major political parties, the ministry said, adding that it would follow developments of the bill and lobby for support and aid from all bodies.

Taiwan had hoped to attend this year's WHA in Geneva, Switzerland, from May 22 to May 31 as an observer, as it had done for the past eight years, but it did not receive an invitation because of opposition from China.

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Taiwan first attended the WHA as an observer in 2009, a year after former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) came to power and began pursuing a more conciliatory policy toward Beijing.

Taiwan's exclusion was widely seen as part of China's efforts to clamp down on Taiwan's international participation, a strategy that has become more aggressive since President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) came to power last year.

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