

Beef turnabout unacceptable: senator

Written by Taipei Times

Tuesday, 05 January 2010 07:46 -

A US senator yesterday told President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) that the legislature's planned amendment to the Act Governing Food Sanitation (食品安全法) was "unacceptable" and that he "expects" the Taiwan-US beef protocol signed in October to be implemented.

In a letter addressed to Ma and released by the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus of Montana wrote in a letter to Ma that he was "strongly disappointed" and that the amendment would "unjustifiably bar certain beef products and would abrogate the import protocol."

"I am also frustrated that Taiwan has unilaterally adopted 'administrative border measures' that appear to run counter to Taiwan's commitments under the import protocol, and are, in some cases, disrupting shipments of deboned US beef that Taiwan has been accepting since 2006," he wrote.

Taiwan's own risk assessment, the World Animal Health Organization (OIE) and numerous other studies, he said, have concluded that all US beef is safe — including ground beef, offal and processed products.

"It is simply unacceptable that Taiwanese authorities continue to take actions that imply otherwise. I expect Taiwan to implement the import protocol in full," he said.

Baucus issued the same stern warning that the US trade representative and US Department of Agriculture gave last week, namely that the passage of the amendment would tarnish Taiwan's reputation as a trading partner.

The senator said he would be watching the developments closely and "hope[d] that the provisions of the proposed amendment to the Food Sanitation Act that are inconsistent with science and Taiwan's bilateral obligations will be removed."

Meanwhile, AIT Director William Stanton yesterday called Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (王金平) to express concern about the amendment, the Central News Agency (CNA) reported.

In response to Baucus' letter, Presidential Office Spokesman Wang Yu-chi (王郁琦) yesterday said that all the office could do now was seek to minimize the impact of the legislature's plan.

"Taiwan-US relations constitute a very important part of our foreign relations," Wang Yu-chi said, adding that the office expected this matter to deal a blow to ties.

Many of Taiwan's friends in the Senate are from agricultural states, he said, adding that he could understand their disappointment.

"The most important thing is to do our best to communicate and explain," he said.

Meanwhile, Minister of Economic Affairs Shih Yen-shiang (施顏清) told the legislature's

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Economics Committee yesterday that he felt Washington had postponed high-level talks on the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) scheduled for this month and next month because of the beef turnaround.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Deputy Spokesman James Chang (詹嘉禮) said Baucus was a longtime supporter of Taiwan and his letter would be taken seriously.

The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), meanwhile, said Ma and National Security Council Secretary-General Su Chi (蘇起) were to blame if US-Taiwan relations suffered over the amendment because the beef protocol was signed without consulting the legislature.

“It is clear that we would not be in a bind with the US had Ma and Su paid attention to and respected public opinion,” DPP Spokesman Tsai Chi-chan (蔡奇昌) said.

Tsai also urged Washington to respect Taiwan’s democracy, saying the amendment was the result of a long and thorough legislative process that reflected the will of the people.

“As a democratic country that values human rights, the US should fully understand and respect the decision of the Legislative Yuan,” he said.

While some have called for Su to be impeached over the controversy, a member of the Control Yuan yesterday disagreed.

CNA reported that a member of the Control Yuan’s US beef review committee said that lifting the restriction on US beef products did not pose a threat to public health, but that Su should be faulted for not communicating with the legislature.

However, ignoring the legislature was not enough to impeach Su, said the official, who wished to remain anonymous.

Although Su should be held accountable for ignoring the legislative process — and for later blaming the Department of Health — his conduct is nowhere near the legal requirements for impeachment, the official said.

Minister of Health Yaung Chih-liang (楊志良), Council of Agriculture Minister Chen Wu-hsiung (陳武雄) and Su have all been summoned by the Control Yuan to explain the government’s decision to expand US access to the domestic beef market.

The review committee is expected to question the three again in later months before making its final decision.

Source: [Taipei Times 2010/01/05](#)