

## **US must stand up for democracy**

By Ryan Shaffer and Raymond Burghardt /  
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The COVID-19 outbreak that originated in central China has spread around the world and claimed over 300,000 lives.

Infectious diseases are part of life, and it is critical that global defenses against pandemics hold. China was the world's first line of defense, and that defense failed.

Beijing cannot be held solely responsible for the impact of the pandemic, and, to be sure, the Chinese are justified in celebrating victories and acts of heroism in China's struggle to contain COVID-19.

However, Beijing cannot be let off the hook for its role in the crisis.

Beijing's response to the outbreak, rooted in the secrecy and paranoia inherent in its authoritarian system, robbed the world of precious time to prepare.

Its lack of transparency has continued to frustrate global efforts to study and understand the virus.

The experience reminds us that Beijing's style of authoritarianism is not compatible with the transparent and effective governance needed to address modern global challenges.

As the US has struggled to find its footing against the virus, it is not surprising to see emotion-driven American responses aimed at China, ranging from efforts by state attorneys general to exact punishment through lawsuits against the Chinese Communist Party to abhorrent attacks against people of Asian descent. Such responses serve no one's interests.

Americans must rise to this occasion by separating frustrations and emotions from

legitimate concerns and focus on responses that reflect American values and strategic interests.

The current situation reminds us of the US' special role as champion of liberal democracy.

It presents the US with a fresh opportunity to stand by its values and its democratic partners in Asia, and in particular Taiwan, which finds itself on the front line of defending democracy in Asia.

Taiwan is among the few countries in the world to succeed in containing COVID-19. Taiwan not only provides a model for global COVID-19 responses, but also provides assistance and by donating medical supplies around the world.

Yet Taiwan's fuller contributions to global health are prevented due to Beijing's bullying of the WHO. In global health, as in many other fields, Taiwan's contributions are a global asset that China holds hostage — for which we all pay a price.

Recent actions by US President Donald Trump's administration and Congress reflect these concerns.

In Congress, a bipartisan group of colleagues has advanced legislation such as the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act, the Taiwan Travel Act and the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act.

For its part, the Trump administration has been strong in expressing support for Taiwan.

In a congratulatory message to President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) on her second-term inauguration, three senior US officials, including US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, offered high praise for Taiwan.

In the Washington Post, columnist Josh Rogin last month rightfully called attention to US efforts to do more with Taiwan, but concluded that “there's so much more that

could and should be done,” calling for Washington to “stand up for our values and our true friends.”

We agree. If recent legislative and rhetorical efforts are to deliver long-term value, they must be backed up with concrete action.

This is why our organization has committed to advancing professional development programs that promote cooperation between civil servants in the US and its partners in Asia — starting with Taiwan.

Bilateral training initiatives for civil servants reinforce the US’ commitment to Taiwan and to democracy in the Western Pacific.

Such initiatives make that commitment abundantly clear not only to the US’ democratic partners, but also to those that would threaten them — and the US.

In Taiwan and across Asia, there is need for heightened US engagement at the practical, working level, and Washington should seize on current momentum to support such initiatives.

Beijing’s style of authoritarian governance exacerbated the COVID-19 crisis and complicated the global response.

We don’t know what the next global crisis will be, but we do know that a shared global response will be better served by governments defined by transparency, democracy, human rights and rule of law.

As Americans, we must use this occasion to reiterate its commitment to these principles and deepen its support for Taiwan and other democratic partners in the Indo-Pacific.

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