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## HEALTH CARE

# WHO official: 'I cannot imagine' U.S. pulling out of the international body

The official's comments come nearly a week after President Donald Trump sent a letter to the WHO threatening to permanently halt funding.



World Health Organization headquarters building in Geneva, Switzerland. | Raphael Satter/AP Photo

By **OMA SEDDIQ**

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The World Health Organization and United States have been “connected since the very beginning,” and a U.S. departure from the international body would be unimaginable, a WHO official said Sunday.

“The United States, since at least 1902, has been the leader in global public health, and I cannot imagine an environment where the United States would not be in WHO and contributing to WHO as it does today,” Stewart Simonson, WHO’s assistant director-general of general management, said in an interview on CNN’s “Fareed Zakaria GPS.”

“WHO was founded by the United States and other member states,” Simonson added. “WHO has benefited from enormous generosity from the people of the United States and almost incalculable technical support.”

The official’s comments come nearly a week after President Donald Trump [sent a letter to the WHO](#) threatening to permanently halt funding and pull out of the international body if the agency “does not commit to major substantive improvements within the next 30 days.”

It is the latest escalation after Trump [last month implemented a temporary freeze](#) on WHO funding based on accusations that the agency mismanaged the onset of the pandemic and failed to hold China accountable on transparency.

In response to charges that the WHO sat on information coming out of China about coronavirus and did not act quickly enough, Simonson said: “Both assertions are wrong on their face.”

“There is no conceivable reason WHO would sit on information. No interest of ours is served by doing so,” he said. “Our interest is in sounding the alarm when the evidence indicates the alarm should be sounded and that is exactly what Dr. Tedros did.”

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has said the agency is looking into the contents of Trump's letter. Simonson acknowledged he

wouldn't make conclusions on China's transparency until an independent review by the World Health Organization occurs.

Simonson, a former aide to Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson, served in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in different roles during the administration of President George W. Bush.

China has repeatedly bashed the U.S. allegations as a cover-up for Trump's own mishandling of the outbreak in the United States.

Trump's letter has received some partial nods of support, however. Germany's health minister, Jens Spahn, [urged the U.S. not to leave the organization](#), but acknowledged that Trump "does have a point — the WHO needs to reform its governance and accountability."

The U.S. contributes roughly \$400 million per year to the WHO, making it by far the biggest donor out of 194 member states. The organization was founded in 1948 and has played a leading role in public health crises, from smallpox to Ebola, which Simonson argued could not be done without support from its members, notably the U.S.

Trump has frequently resorted to ending or limiting U.S. involvement in international organizations under his "America First" approach. Earlier in his presidency, he withdrew from the Paris Climate Accord and the Iran nuclear agreement.

Besides the WHO, Trump also recently revealed [plans to withdraw from the Open Skies Treaty](#), an agreement signed by more than 30 nations that permits open surveillance over military activities. The move has drawn backlash from Democrats as well as European countries.

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