Haley fights to get US companies a bigger piece of the action on lucrative UN contracts

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As part of Nikki Haley's push to advance the Trump administration's “America First” agenda at the United Nations, the hard-charging ambassador is fighting for U.S. businesses to get a bigger slice of the more than $18 billion in contracts the world body hands out each year.

The U.S. already is the biggest recipient of these procurement contracts, but officials say that number is growing since Haley took office. In 2017, the U.S. won $1.74 billion in contracts -- approximately 9 percent of the $18.6 billion available. The next highest was India, which picked up 4.8 percent of all contracts.

That marks almost a 10 percent uptick in contracts awarded to U.S. businesses from 2016.

But Haley and the U.S. Mission aren’t done, and are looking at ways to get more lucrative contracts awarded. It’s part of a broader effort by Haley and the Trump administration to make sure the United Nations' biggest contributor gets a better deal there.

“We are very proud of our American companies, from the quality of their products to the efficiencies of their services. We will continue to use all of the resources we have available to help our companies win U.N. contracts,” Haley told Fox News.

Her office is not necessarily strongarming the U.N. into awarding contracts to American companies -- it is a competitive process -- but is urging those companies to seek U.N. business while facilitating meetings between them and U.N. officials.

Cherith Norman Chalet, the U.S. representative for U.N. Management and Reform, told Fox News that the U.S. Mission is increasing the number of seminars across the country that feature business representatives and officials from U.N. agencies, including UNICEF and the World Food Program.

“It's to try to help companies understand the process, what the opportunities are at the U.N. and what the needs the U.N. are looking for, so really trying to matchmake in the best possible way,” she said.

Whereas in recent years there would be a few general seminars a year, all in New York, this year the U.S. Mission -- working with the Commerce Department -- is holding a number of state-specific seminars across America.

So far, these have been held in Wisconsin, Rhode Island and Mississippi. On Thursday, a seminar in Detroit, Mich., featured more than 150 companies along with representatives from the Secretariat, U.N. Development Program, the World Food Program and UNICEF.

In October, there will be a private-sector day, which will also include discussions and information about the policy side of the U.N. and the impact on businesses.

Another more general seminar is being planned in New York this fall on the subject of aviation, in hopes of leveling the playing field on a contract area that traditionally has been dominated by Russia.

The goal, Chalet said, is "to increase visibility of the U.S. Mission led by Ambassador Haley, showing that we’re going to go further in ensuring that U.S. companies have equal opportunity at the U.N. and that we will continue to be the number one in procuring those contracts.”

“We’ve done well and we’re doing better and we have more to go,” she said.

While the numbers on 2018 contracts are not yet available, officials say they are hopeful for continued growth and the seminars have seen a significant increase in attendance.

In addition to the 9 percent increase in procurement contracts, the U.S. says the number of U.S. companies registered as vendors on the U.N. Global Marketplace -- where companies register to bid on U.N. contracts and to be alerted about available contracts -- spiked from 10,545 in 2016 to 16,004 in 2017

“From what we can tell based on the seminars, as well as interaction with U.N., what these have done this year is really match the needs and increased awareness of companies so they can be even better prepared to put in the bids, and be more successful in being selected,” Chalet said.

The Better World Campaign, which pushes for better relations between the U.S. and the U.N., hailed the developments and noted that while the top states that benefited from contracts were New York, New Jersey, Maryland and California, the benefits were being felt across the country.

“Forty-two states plus Washington D.C. are home to American companies that were awarded UN contracts in 2017,” President Peter Yao said in a statement.

“This new data confirms that the U.N. is not only in America’s foreign policy and national security interests, American corporations also benefit more than any other country in the world from procurement contracts with the U.N,” he said.

The push represents part of the broader effort by the U.N.-skeptical administration to get a better value at the organization, even as it moves to punish some arms of the world body.

While Haley has been a primary driver of action at the Security Council on areas such as North Korea and South Sudan, the U.S. has also pulled back where it doesn’t see that value.

The administration has withdrawn from the Human Rights Council, calling it a "cesspool of political bias," and has gutted funding to the U.N. Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA). The U.S. has also demanded cuts to the U.N. budget.

This week in a speech in West Virginia, Trump praised Haley for securing a $1.3 billion cut in U.N. spending since taking office -- which he said had saved taxpayers $350 million.