

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HJM 4009

As Reported by House Committee On:
Health Care & Wellness

Brief Description: Requesting that Taiwan be allowed to participate in the World Health Organization.

Sponsors: Representatives Kessler, Ericksen, Bailey, Roach, Hinkle, Ahern, Schual-Berke, Rodne, Chandler, Ross, Upthegrove, Kenney, Dunn, Ormsby and Santos.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Health Care & Wellness: 2/4/08 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Memorializes the President of the United States, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and the Director-General of the World Health Organization to support Taiwan's participation in the World Health Organization.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE & WELLNESS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Cody, Chair; Hinkle, Ranking Minority Member; Alexander, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Barlow, Campbell, Condotta, DeBolt, Green, Moeller, Pedersen and Schual-Berke.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Seaquist.

Staff: Dave Knutson (786-7146).

Background:

The World Health Organization (WHO), headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, is one of the original agencies of the United Nations (UN), its Constitution entering into force on the first World Health Day, April 7, 1948. The WHO, the directing and coordinating authority on international health for the UN system, states that its primary objective is, "the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health."

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The WHO, in conformity with the Charter of the UN, declares in its Constitution that, "the following principles are basic to the happiness, harmonious relations and security of all peoples:

- Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.
- The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.
- The health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependent upon the fullest co-operation of individuals and States.
- The achievement of any State in the promotion and protection of health is of value to all.
- Unequal development in different countries in the promotion of health and control of disease, especially communicable disease, is a common danger.
- Healthy development of the child is of basic importance; the ability to live harmoniously in a changing total environment is essential to such development.
- The extension to all peoples of the benefits of medical, psychological and related knowledge is essential to the fullest attainment of health.
- Informed opinion and active co-operation on the part of the public are of the utmost importance in the improvement of the health of the people.
- Governments have a responsibility for the health of their peoples which can be fulfilled only by the provision of adequate health and social measures."

Responsibilities of the WHO include: the International Classification of Disease; producing health guidelines and standards; assisting countries in addressing public health concerns; coordinating international responses to infectious diseases, such as smallpox, polio, and most recently, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Avian Flu; supporting research; and working to prevent chronic diseases and enhance global health security.

According to the WHO Constitution, "Members of the United Nations may become Members of the Organization by signing or otherwise accepting" the WHO Constitution, may become members if the State was "Invited to send observers to the International Health Conference held in New York, 1946...by signing or otherwise accepting [the] Constitution...before the first session of the Health Assembly," or may, "apply to become Members and shall be admitted as Members when their application has been approved by a simple majority vote of the Health Assembly."

The Health Assembly is the "supreme decision-making body" for the WHO. It generally meets in Geneva, Switzerland in May of each year and is attended by delegations from all 193 Member States. The Executive Board of the Health Assembly is comprised of 34 members, elected to three-year terms, who are "technically qualified in the fields of health."

The membership of the WHO is currently comprised by all UN Member States, except Liechtenstein and two non-UN Member States: Niue and the Cook Islands. According to the WHO, territories which are not responsible for the conduct of their international relations may be admitted as Associate Members upon an application made on their behalf by a Member or

other authority responsible for their international relations. Puerto Rico and Tokelau are Associate Members. Other entities or organizations may be granted Observer Status, examples include Palestine and Vatican City.

Taiwan has pursued Observer Status in the WHO since 1997, but has not been granted this status.

Summary of Bill:

President Bush, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and the Director-General of the WHO are urged to support Taiwan's participation in the WHO as an observer, support Taiwan's full participation in the WHO's technical meetings, support Taiwan's partnership in the WHO's Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network, and support Taiwan's integration into the International Health Regulations 2005 Mechanism.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) With the many global health challenges facing the peoples of the world, it is important for all nations to participate in the activities of the WHO. There are 23 million people living in Taiwan that deserve to be represented in and participate in the important health protection and promotion activities in which the WHO is engaged.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Robert C.M. Chen, Director General, Taipai Economic Cultural Office, Seattle.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.