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State of Minnesota

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NINETY-SECOND SESSION

H. F. No. **2518**

04/13/2021

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The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Health Finance and Policy

- 1.1 A resolution
- 1.2 urging increased action to address the COVID-19 pandemic and save lives in Minnesota
- 1.3 by entering into medical and scientific collaboration with the nation of Cuba;
- 1.4 memorializing Congress and the President of the United States to remove restrictions
- 1.5 on collaboration.
- 1.6 WHEREAS, although COVID-19 cases and fatalities in the United States have declined
- 1.7 recently, the pandemic is far from over, with many experts warning that a fourth wave may be
- 1.8 imminent in the next months in view of the aggressive nature of the B.1.1.7 variant and other
- 1.9 variants that are already spreading in the United States; and
- 1.10 WHEREAS, the United States has lagged behind other countries in critical medical research
- 1.11 that would have addressed the pandemic, such as its failure to engage in robust genomic sequencing,
- 1.12 leaving the United States particularly vulnerable to new variants, with the United States in February
- 1.13 2021 ranked 36th in the world in sequencing; and
- 1.14 WHEREAS, it has been estimated that vaccine nationalism could cost rich nations trillions
- 1.15 of dollars, and the United States \$16,000,000,000 if it fails to collaborate with other nations, because
- 1.16 no one is safe until everyone is safe; and
- 1.17 WHEREAS, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres has warned against vaccine
- 1.18 nationalism because the virus easily crosses borders from poor nations to wealthier ones like the
- 1.19 United States and it is in the national interest of the United States to collaborate with other countries;
- 1.20 and
- 1.21 WHEREAS, as of February 19, 2021, the United States had experienced the highest number
- 1.22 of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the world, with approximately 29,000,000 cases and 507,000
- 1.23 deaths, while Cuba had experienced approximately 43,000 cases and 287 deaths; and
- 1.24 WHEREAS, as of February 19, 2021, the United States had experienced 1,527 deaths per
- 1.25 one million people from COVID-19 while Cuba had 25 deaths per one million people; and

2.1 WHEREAS, as of February 19, 2021, with approximately twice the population of Minnesota,
2.2 Cuba had experienced only 287 deaths from COVID-19 compared to Minnesota's 6,480; and

2.3 WHEREAS, Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities in the United States are about four
2.4 times more likely than white people to be hospitalized due to COVID-19 and are dying from the
2.5 disease in disproportionate numbers; and

2.6 WHEREAS, life expectancy in the United States has decreased by 1.13 years since the
2.7 pandemic began, and is estimated to have decreased by 2.10 years among Black people and 3.05
2.8 years among Latinos, while Native Americans continue to have the lowest life expectancy of all
2.9 groups; and

2.10 WHEREAS, the United States still faces many challenges ahead regarding what are termed
2.11 "long haulers" who present varying and continuing symptoms with no consistent explanation; and

2.12 WHEREAS, Cuba offers treatment regimens for patients and prevention protocols for health
2.13 workers, including clinical trials of Interferon Alpha 2B Recombinant, now in standard use in China
2.14 and Cuba, and more than 45 countries have expressed an interest in acquiring this pharmaceutical
2.15 to include in their treatments in some of the worst cases of COVID-19; and

2.16 WHEREAS, Interferon Alpha 2B Recombinant, as well as other innovative Cuban
2.17 pharmaceuticals used to treat lung cancer and diabetes, are not available in the United States because
2.18 of the 60-year-old United States embargo against Cuba; and

2.19 WHEREAS, the United States embargo has severely restricted collaboration on scientific
2.20 and medical research that interferes with the potential of saving lives in the face of the COVID-19
2.21 pandemic; and

2.22 WHEREAS, despite the punishing and deadly United States embargo, Cuba has achieved
2.23 health and medical achievements that are unparalleled even in wealthy nations and, as such, is in
2.24 a position to offer medical assistance internationally; and

2.25 WHEREAS, in 2015, the World Health Organization recognized Cuba's medical system as
2.26 a worldwide leader in biotechnology; and

2.27 WHEREAS, Minnesota is home to many prestigious medical institutions, organizations, and
2.28 businesses and is in a position to provide leadership to the rest of the country in medical research,
2.29 treatment, and cooperation; and

2.30 WHEREAS, despite the United States embargo, there is precedent for medical collaboration
2.31 between Cuba and the United States; and

2.32 WHEREAS, on December 16, 2020, in a meeting designed to share Cuba's experiences
2.33 working on the front lines against COVID-19, top officials of the Cuban Ministry of Health met
2.34 with leaders of the University of Minnesota Medical School, School of Nursing, and School of

3.1 Public Health, along with the participation of Dr. Michael Osterholm, University of Minnesota
3.2 President Joan Gabel, and Senator Amy Klobuchar; and

3.3 WHEREAS, there have been multi-year joint ventures between Cuba's Center for Molecular
3.4 Immunology and Buffalo's Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center in developing CIMAvax,
3.5 the Cuban lung cancer vaccine, as well as a collaboration between medical personnel from Cuba
3.6 and the University of Illinois on maternal and infant health; and

3.7 WHEREAS, on June 13, 2016, the United States Department of Health and Human Services
3.8 and the Cuban Ministry of Public Health signed a Memorandum of Understanding that is still in
3.9 force and allows collaboration on a range of public health issues, including global health security,
3.10 research and development, and technology; and

3.11 WHEREAS, as of February 19, 2021, Cuba is the only country in Latin America that is
3.12 working on a COVID-19 vaccine and, with four vaccines in development, may be on the brink of
3.13 mass producing sufficient supplies to begin offering them to visitors to the island and still conclude
3.14 2021 with most of its population vaccinated; and

3.15 WHEREAS, Cuba has a long history of providing international medical aid and health care
3.16 to the international community, especially in developing countries, and in 2005 offered the assistance
3.17 of 1,100 doctors to immediately deploy to New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina; and

3.18 WHEREAS, the organization that provides such assistance, Cuba's Henry Reeve International
3.19 Medical Brigade, was decisive in the fight against the Ebola epidemic in West Africa and has
3.20 stepped forward in many epidemics around the world, including dengue fever, HIV/AIDS, swine
3.21 flu, and hepatitis and now, COVID-19; and

3.22 WHEREAS, the Henry Reeve Brigade has been nominated for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize
3.23 by at least 36,000 prominent individuals and organizations including parliamentarians, medical
3.24 professionals, academics, and others; and

3.25 WHEREAS, Cuba currently has medical brigades of about 37,000 health workers equipped
3.26 with Cuban pharmaceuticals in 67 countries assisting in fighting the pandemic and other diseases;
3.27 and

3.28 WHEREAS, the Minnesota Legislature previously urged collaboration with Cuba and removal
3.29 of the United States embargo when, in 2008, it passed and sent to Governor Tim Pawlenty a
3.30 resolution advocating the end of trade and financial and travel restrictions on Cuba; and

3.31 WHEREAS, legislation urging medical collaboration with Cuba was introduced in both
3.32 houses of the Minnesota Legislature at the end of the 91st Session; and

3.33 WHEREAS, both St. Paul and Minneapolis have adopted resolutions urging collaboration
3.34 with Cuba and an end to the United States embargo; and

4.1 WHEREAS, since the outbreak of the pandemic, the cities of Berkeley, Oakland, Richmond,
4.2 Sacramento, San Francisco, and Santa Cruz, California; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Chicago,
4.3 Illinois; Cleveland, Ohio; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Seattle, Washington, as well as at least
4.4 seven labor councils and the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Board of School Directors, have passed
4.5 resolutions urging medical and other collaboration with Cuba; and

4.6 WHEREAS, now is the time to call for international cooperation and solidarity in the face
4.7 of the COVID-19 pandemic; and

4.8 WHEREAS, the people of Minnesota and its underserved communities would benefit from
4.9 the medical expertise and advancement in Cuba, as have many countries around the world; NOW,
4.10 THEREFORE,

4.11 BE IT RESOLVED by the Legislature of the State of Minnesota that it calls on Governor
4.12 Tim Walz to direct the Department of Health and other agencies, as appropriate, to further investigate
4.13 the potential for collaborating with Cuba to obtain crucial assistance and expertise for Minnesota
4.14 residents and, in particular, its underserved Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities.

4.15 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislature of the State of Minnesota calls on the
4.16 United States Congress and the President of the United States to lift restrictions on access to Cuban
4.17 medical expertise in order to more effectively combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.18 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of State of the State of Minnesota is directed
4.19 to prepare copies of this memorial and transmit them to the President of the United States, the
4.20 President and the Secretary of the United States Senate, the Speaker and the Clerk of the United
4.21 States House of Representatives, and Minnesota's Senators and Representatives in Congress.