

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
77R5193 MKS-D

S.C.R. 21
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DIGEST

Border health conditions not only pose an immediate risk to those who live along either side of the United State-Mexico border, but are also are a health concern for all of the United States, and unaddressed health concerns in this region will only continue to worsen as the border population and its mobility increase, thereby escalating the risks to other areas of exposure and transmission of disease. While the State of Texas has attempted to address many of the health issues facing the border population in Texas, binational cooperation at the federal level is essential to addressing these health concerns. In 1999, the Texas Legislature called for an in-depth study of the public health infrastructure and barriers to a cooperative effort between Texas and Mexico; results of the study indicate that differences in technology and limitations on the exchange of technology, disparities in methods of collecting data and confidentiality provisions that restrict information sharing, and cultural differences that affect interaction between local and state health departments all combine to inhibit collaboration on health issues of mutual concern. An example of the consequences of such barriers to cooperation occurred in 1999, when an outbreak of dengue fever in South Texas was traced back to Mexican cities and was thought to have been brought from Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, to Laredo, Texas. Despite the implications for an outbreak across the border, Mexican health officials were limited in their ability to confirm cases of the mosquito-borne illness, and provisions in the Mexican Constitution restricted them from sharing the results of tests performed on Mexican citizens with Texas health officials. Similar instances have occurred where incidences of tuberculosis, salmonella, and malaria around the United States were found to have started in the Texas-Mexico border region. It is in the interest of the United States to control the spread of diseases, beginning in the places where they originate, and poverty and poor health conditions along the United States-Mexico border region provide a large incubation ground for diseases, however the efforts of one state or country alone will not address conditions that are present on both sides of the border, or legal issues that create incompatibilities between approaches, making a cooperative binational effort vitally important. The United States and Mexico have worked in concert in forming NAFTA and related side agreements that address environmental infrastructure issues, creating the Border Environment Cooperation Commission and establishing the North American Development Bank; the success of these joint ventures suggests that forming similar international agreements to improve the public health infrastructure and finding ways to address the exchange of technology and information will improve the quality of life for residents of the border region as well as reduce the public health risks in the spread of disease. Establishing an agreement between the United States and Mexico will show a commitment to the issue of public health and acknowledgment that the spread of disease is an international problem without boundaries.

PURPOSE

As proposed S.C.R. 21 submits the following resolution:

Requires the Texas secretary of state to forward official copies of this resolution to the president of the United States, to the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the senate of the United States Congress, and to all the members of the Texas delegation to the congress with the request that this resolution be officially entered in the Congressional Record as a memorial to the Congress of the United State of America.