



Legislation Text

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CITY OF SEATTLE

RESOLUTION _____

A RESOLUTION prioritizing people over the profits of pharmaceutical companies; supporting the production of COVID-19 vaccine around the world; urging President Biden to end U.S. opposition to the Waiver from Certain Provisions of the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement for the Prevention, Containment and Treatment of COVID-19 at the World Trade Organization (WTO).

WHEREAS, COVID-19 is a global pandemic, spreading internationally; and

WHEREAS, rapid and widespread dissemination of vaccinations in all countries is at the center of the strategy by public health professionals to stop the spread of COVID-19 through the development of herd immunity; and

WHEREAS, new COVID-19 variants continue to develop throughout the world, and the sooner vaccines are available in all countries, the greater the likelihood of success in the battle against COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, vaccinations are critical to reopening and economic recovery in both developed countries and the Global South; and

WHEREAS, one in five of Seattle's population is born in another county and they, and many more Seattle residents have family abroad, some living in countries without adequate access to vaccine; and

WHEREAS, on April 9, 2021, CNBC quoted World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus regarding vaccine doses that "over 87% have gone to high-income or upper- and middle-income countries, while low-income countries have received just 0.2%," and that "[o]n average, 1 in 4 people in high-income countries have received a coronavirus vaccine, compared with just 1 in more than 500 in low-income countries, according to Tedros"; and

WHEREAS, on February 17, 2021, *The Wall Street Journal* reported, “The disparity could also slow the global economic recovery more broadly and prolong the pandemic, by creating pockets of unchecked infection that could become breeding grounds for mutations of the virus,” and that “[a] recent study by the U.S.-based National Bureau for Economic Research concluded that a failure to inoculate all countries equitably could wind up costing advanced economies up to \$2.6 trillion-far more than the cost of supplying global vaccine coverage”; and

WHEREAS, the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (“TRIPS Agreement”) enforces intellectual property (IP) rights internationally, including prohibiting the production of COVID-19 vaccine doses in many low-income countries; and

WHEREAS, the WTO has been widely criticized for prioritizing the profits of multinational corporations over the needs of regular, working-class people around the world, prompting the historic protest in Seattle in 1999 at the WTO Ministerial Conference; and

WHEREAS, global trade laws under capitalism maximize profits for the elite in all countries, at the expense of all working people around the world and especially in the Global South; and

WHEREAS, on March 15, 2021, *Pharmaceutical Technology* reported that WTO representatives from South Africa and India “asked the WTO to allow member countries to waive intellectual property (IP) rights, including patents, related to Covid-19 vaccines and other technologies for the duration of the pandemic”; and

WHEREAS, the March 15 *Pharmaceutical Technology* article further reported that “the US, the UK and the European Union (EU), among other richer countries, have been vocal opponents of the IP waiver proposal” in addition to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA); and

WHEREAS, on March 10, 2021, Reuters reported, “Richer members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) blocked a push by over 80 developing countries on Wednesday to waive patent rights in an effort to

boost production of COVID-19 vaccines for poor nations”; and

WHEREAS, on February 26, 2021, a letter to President Biden signed by over 400 community organizations and labor unions (Attachment A to this resolution) stated that “we urge your administration to lift the U.S. blockage of the ‘Waiver from Certain Provisions of the TRIPS Agreement for the Prevention, Containment and Treatment of COVID-19’”; and

WHEREAS, the letter further entreats President Biden, “with so many of the world’s nations supporting this emergency waiver already, you can also help restore America’s moral and public health leadership in the world by siding with the majority to prioritize saving lives over protecting pharmaceutical corporation monopolies and profits. This new position would be widely noted, given U.S. officials’ shameful attack on the waiver at a January WTO meeting”; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 is a life-threatening pandemic, and the Seattle City Council does not agree with the argument made by large pharmaceutical companies in a December 8, 2020, IFPMA press release that “IP enables research and development and ensures that the next generation of inventors and investors will remain engaged”; and

WHEREAS, on November 18, 2020, *Scientific American* reported, “Much of the pioneering work on mRNA vaccines was done with government money, though drugmakers could walk away with big profits,” and that “[t]he vaccines made by Pfizer and Moderna, which are likely to be the first to win FDA approval, in particular rely heavily on two fundamental discoveries that emerged from federally funded research: the viral protein designed by Graham and his colleagues, and the concept of RNA modification, first developed by Drew Weissman and Katalin Karikó at the University of Pennsylvania”; and

WHEREAS, on April 8, 2021, *The New York Times* reported about Dr. Katalin Karikó, explaining that she is “one of the heroes of Covid-19 vaccine development. Her work, with her close collaborator, Dr. Drew Weissman of the University of Pennsylvania, laid the foundation for the stunningly successful vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna,” and that “[s]he never made more than \$60,000 a year”; and

WHEREAS, the Seattle City Council recognizes that big pharmaceutical companies profiting off human misery is nothing new, and that there is widespread outrage at artificially high prices for life-saving insulin, EpiPens, and drugs to treat cystic fibrosis and tuberculosis, and at patent monopolies on essential AIDS medications that made them inaccessible and unaffordable in the Global South for a decade; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEATTLE THAT:

Section 1. The Seattle City Council joins the more than 400 community organizations, labor unions, faith groups, and more in urging the Biden Administration to end the US opposition to the Waiver from Certain Provisions of the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights Agreement for the Prevention, Containment and Treatment of COVID-19 at the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Seattle City Council urges the Biden Administration to immediately share publicly all research, technology, techniques, and other information relevant to the production of COVID-19 vaccines (such as mRNA research) that is owned or co-owned by the U.S. The Seattle City Council shall sign onto the open letter to President Biden titled, “To Help End the Pandemic as Quickly as Possible and Restore U.S. International Cooperation, Please End Trump’s Blockade of the COVID-19 Emergency Waiver of WTO Rules So More Vaccines and Treatment Can Be Produced,” substantially as shown in Attachment A to this resolution.

Section 2. The Seattle City Council requests that the Office of Intergovernmental Relations communicate the content of this resolution to the Executive Office of the President and to Seattle’s Congressional Delegation in Washington, D.C.

Adopted by the City Council the _____ day of _____, 2021, and signed by me in open session in authentication of its adoption this _____ day of _____, 2021.

President _____ of the City Council

Filed by me this _____ day of _____, 2021.

Monica Martinez Simmons, City Clerk

(Seal)

Attachments:

Attachment A - COVID-19 Vaccine Patent Waiver Letter