

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJM 8007

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Judiciary, February 12, 2003

Brief Description: Urging adoption of a treaty fighting discrimination against women.

Sponsors: Senators Fraser, Kohl-Welles, McCaslin, Franklin, Regala, Fairley, B. Sheldon, Kline, Winsley, Rasmussen, Haugen, Spanel, McAuliffe, Prentice, Brown, Thibaudeau, Jacobsen, Keiser and Eide.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Judiciary: 2/7/03, 2/12/03 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators McCaslin, Chair; Esser, Vice Chair; Haugen, Kline and Thibaudeau.

Staff: Jinnah Rose-McFadden (786-7421)

Background: In 1979 the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), often referred to as the "Bill of Rights" for women. CEDAW defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets a framework for action to end such discrimination. Ratification of CEDAW obliges states' parties to take steps to eliminate sex based discrimination and requires that a report be submitted, every four years, to the Secretary General of the United Nations detailing those steps taken.

To date, 170 nations have ratified CEDAW. While the United States was active in drafting CEDAW and President Carter signed the treaty in 1980, the United States has not yet ratified CEDAW. Ratification by the United States requires the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to favorably pass the treaty to the U.S. Senate floor. Upon a 2/3 majority vote by the U.S. Senate, ratification of CEDAW would be completed by filing a copy of the signed treaty with the United Nations.

The legislatures of the following states have endorsed United States ratification of CEDAW: California, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, and Vermont.

Summary of Bill: The Washington State Legislature endorses the ratification of CEDAW and requests that President Bush and Secretary of State Powell place CEDAW in the highest category of priority in order to accelerate the treaty's passage through the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the full U.S. Senate.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: In many areas of the world, women experience high levels of violence and there are insufficient laws in place to protect women from harm. While the ratification of CEDAW does not offer a simple solution to this problem, it does create standards and values for all to adhere to. International treaties, like CEDAW, connect citizens to the world by opening dialogue on societal and global concerns that are often difficult to discuss. The United States should take part in this dialogue by actively working within the United Nations system to address societal, economic, and human rights abuses.

This Joint Memorial urges the United States to ratify CEDAW. It is important for our state and our country to support equality and justice for all women. On a national level, Washington State has long been considered a moral leader, and globally, the United States has long been considered a moral leader. Yet, the United States remains the only industrialized nation to withhold ratification of CEDAW. Two-thirds of all members of the United Nations have ratified CEDAW, and within the United States, seven states and 58 cities or counties have endorsed the ratification of this treaty. Once the United States ratifies CEDAW, the United States would be eligible to join the committee that monitors CEDAW. In this way, the United States could strongly influence global policies affecting women.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Senator Fraser, prime sponsor; Suzanne Brown, WA Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs; Bruce Kochis, University of Washington; Maria Victoria Ruben, WWSA; Ashley DeMoss.