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SCR-24 Alternatives to cobalt mined in Africa using child slave labor. (2023-2024)

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Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 24

CHAPTER 149

Relative to cobalt mining.

[Filed with Secretary of State August 31, 2023.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SCR 24, Bradford. Alternatives to cobalt mined in Africa using child slave labor.

This measure would declare that the Legislature should pass laws that halt the importation of cobalt or any product using cobalt mined in Africa using child slave labor and encourage the production of cobalt and other critical minerals ethically sourced from within the United States.

Fiscal Committee: no

WHEREAS, People around the world increasingly rely on rechargeable batteries to power mobile phones, all-electric vehicles, laptop computers, and other portable devices; and

WHEREAS, Cobalt is an essential material for lithium ion battery technology; and

WHEREAS, The growing global market for portable electronic devices and rechargeable batteries is driving the increasing demand for the extraction of cobalt; and

WHEREAS, The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is the source of more than two-thirds of the world's cobalt; and

WHEREAS, The largest mines in the DRC are located in the southern Katanga province with a capacity of over 1,000,000 tons per year of cobalt ore; and

WHEREAS, The use of child slave labor has become inextricably linked to the mining and collection of cobalt ore; and

WHEREAS, Artisanal miners include children as young as six years of age who scavenge for rocks containing cobalt, and wash and sort the ore before it is sold; and

WHEREAS, Chronic exposure to dust containing cobalt can result in a potentially fatal lung disease called hard metal lung disease; and

WHEREAS, The inhalation of cobalt particles can also cause respiratory sensitization, asthma, shortness of breath, and decreased pulmonary function; and

WHEREAS, The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated in 2014 that approximately 40,000 boys and girls work in all the mines across the southern DRC, many of them involved in cobalt mining; and

WHEREAS, It is not uncommon for these children to be beaten by security guards when they trespass on those mining companies' property; and

WHEREAS, California companies involved in the lithium battery supply chain are aiding and abetting in the death and serious injury of child slaves who extract cobalt to further their environmental goals; and

WHEREAS, California has become a world leader in areas of environmental protection, innovation, and justice; and

WHEREAS, California has mandated that 100 percent of new cars sold must be zero emission by 2035; and

WHEREAS, The use of child labor to support the mining for cobalt in the manufacturing of lithium used to power electric vehicles should not be ignored; and

WHEREAS, Large deposits of lithium can be found in California, such as in the Salton Sea; and

WHEREAS, Large deposits of cobalt can be found across the United States; and

WHEREAS, California must take remedial action to eliminate its participation in the cobalt supply chain that perpetuates human rights abuses and child slave labor; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly thereof concurring, That the Legislature recognizes its duty to protect against human rights abuses; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature encourages the production of cobalt and other critical minerals ethically sourced from within the United States; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature should pass laws that halt the importation of cobalt or any product using cobalt mined in Africa using child slave labor; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.