

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 6344

As Amended by House, March 9, 2010

Title: An act relating to campaign contribution limits.

Brief Description: Concerning campaign contribution limits.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Government Operations & Elections (originally sponsored by Senators Fairley, Prentice, Hargrove, Kauffman, Marr and McDermott).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 1/21/10, 1/26/10 [DPS, DNP].

Passed Senate: 2/10/10, 39-9; 3/09/10, 35-11.

Passed House: 2/28/10, 90-6.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6344 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Fairley, Chair; Oemig, Vice Chair; McDermott, Pridemore and Swecker.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Roach, Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Edward Redmond (786-7471)

Background: In 1992 the Legislature passed the Fair Campaign Practices Act in response to the passage of Initiative 134. Initiative 134 imposed campaign contribution limits on elections for statewide and legislative office, further regulated independent expenditures, restricted the use of public funds for political purposes, and required public officials to report gifts received in excess of \$50. The stated purposes of the initiative were to: (1) give individuals and interest groups equal opportunities to influence elective and governmental processes; (2) reduce the influence of large organizational contributors; and (3) restore public trust in governmental institutions and the electoral process. In 2006 contribution limits were expanded to include elections for certain county and special purpose district offices and for judicial offices.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Contributions from an individual, a union or business, or a political action committee may not in the aggregate exceed \$800 per election to a candidate for state legislative office or county office, and may not in the aggregate exceed \$1,600 per election to a candidate for a public office in a special purpose district or a state office other than a state legislative office.

Limits also apply to political parties. State party central committees, minor party committees, and legislative caucus committees may contribute an aggregate of up to \$0.80 per registered voter in the candidate's jurisdiction for an election cycle. County central committees and legislative district committees may contribute an aggregate of up to \$0.40 per registered voter in the candidate's district. Contributions received from county central committees and legislative district committees combined may not exceed an amount more than \$0.40 times the number of registered voters in the jurisdiction from which the candidate is elected.

These dollar amounts are adjusted for inflation by the Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) every even-numbered calendar year.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The list of public offices requiring campaign contribution limits is expanded to include all charter county, noncharter county, city council, and mayoral offices. Contributions from an individual, a union, or business may not in the aggregate exceed \$800 per election to a candidate for such offices. Local districts with contribution limits currently established for city council or mayoral campaigns may continue to apply such standards so long as the contribution limit does not exceed \$800. The PDC adjusts this limit for inflation every even-numbered calendar year.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: Campaign contribution limits have served the state well. Campaigns for most local offices, however, have not been subject to contribution limits. This has resulted in numerous instances where the contributions to local office campaigns have been many times higher than what is allowed for campaigns for state offices. The absence of limits on campaign contributions presents at least the potential for undue influence.

Persons Testifying: PRO: John King, Washington Public Campaigns.

House Amendment(s): The House amendments places city council and mayoral candidates within the same statutory section concerning contribution limits for state elected officials and other candidates. Furthermore, it updates the contribution limits to current allowances, and permits city council and mayoral races to receive the same contribution limits from bona fide political parties as authorized for other candidates.