

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1108

As Passed House:

March 9, 2001

Title: An act relating to the secretary of state.

Brief Description: Authorizing the secretary of state to observe county election facilities.

Sponsors: By Representatives Bush, Kenney, Talcott, Lambert, D. Schmidt, Lantz, Benson, Cox, Campbell, Woods, Veloria, Esser, Haigh, Mulliken, Ogden, Mielke, Boldt, Casada, Morell, Buck, Pearson, Roach, Clements, Schoesler, Romero, Darneille, Carrell, Van Luven, Edwards, Kagi and Hurst.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government: 2/2/01, 2/19/01 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/9/01, 98-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows the Secretary of State to make unannounced visits to county election offices to observe the handling, processing, counting, or tabulation of ballots.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives McMorris, Republican Co-Chair; Romero, Democratic Co-Chair; Miloscia, Democratic Vice Chair; Haigh, Lambert, McDermott and D. Schmidt.

Staff: Jim Morishima (786-7191).

Background:

During a special, primary, or general election, ballots are handled, processed, counted, and tabulated in several locations:

- At the polls: Ballots cast at the polls may be tabulated by poll-site ballot counting devices and electronically transmitted to a central reporting location after the close of

the polls. In counties not using poll-site ballot counting devices, the ballots are transported to the county counting center for tabulation.

- At the county counting center: Voted, un-tallied ballots cast at the polling sites, absentee ballots, and mail ballots are delivered to the county counting center where they are processed. This process is open to the public and subject to observation by representatives from the major parties. However, only authorized personnel may touch a ballot or operate a ballot tallying machine.
- At the canvassing board: The county canvassing board reviews and tabulates ballots that were questioned at the polls or at the counting center.

The Secretary of State is the chief election officer for all elections. The secretary is responsible for canvassing the final election returns for measures and offices that effect more than one county. He or she is also responsible for certifying and inspecting voting machines, and training county election officials.

Summary of Bill:

The Secretary of State may make unannounced visits to county election offices to observe the handling, processing, counting, or tabulation of ballots.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

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

Testimony For: Allowing the Secretary of State to make unannounced inspections would increase the public's confidence in the accuracy and sanctity of the vote. Washington has a good reputation and this bill would just validate the process, making voters more confident in the results. The Secretary of State arguably already has this power, but it is not specifically listed anywhere in statute.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Bush, prime sponsor; and Bob Terwilliger, County Auditor's Association.