

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5338

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
State & Local Government, March 5, 2001

Title: An act relating to the process for election to Washington state and federal elective office, except governor and other executive offices.

Brief Description: Establishing instant runoff voting.

Sponsors: Senators Kline, Finkbeiner and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: State & Local Government: 2/22/01, 3/5/01 [DPS-WM, DNP].
Ways & Means: 3/8/01.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5338 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Patterson, Chair; Fairley, Vice Chair; Hale, Haugen, Kline and Swecker.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Gardner, Horn and T. Sheldon.

Staff: Aaron Jennings (786-7445)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Steve Jones (786-7440)

Background: In the general election, the candidate with the most votes, no majority required, wins the election. In the partisan primary, the candidate with the most votes for an office within his or her political party is the party's nominee. In the nonpartisan primary election, the top two candidates go on to the general election, except the candidate who receives a majority for a judicial office, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction is the only candidate to appear on the general election ballot.

Summary of Substitute Bill: An instant runoff voting (IRV) system requires the winning candidate to have a majority of votes. Each voter is allowed to vote for five choices, but is not required to use all his or her choices, showing a preference by labeling his first choice 1, second choice 2, etc. All first choice votes are counted; if a candidate receives a majority of the vote he or she wins. If no candidate wins a majority, the candidate with the least amount of votes is removed and all votes for that candidate are redistributed to the other candidates based on the next choice of the voters who selected the removed candidate. This

process is continued until a candidate has a majority. If a voter runs out of choices, then that ballot is discarded.

Political subdivisions are allowed to use IRV. If the major political parties determine by their party rules not to allow the blanket primary, the IRV system is used to select candidates for state legislature, state judges, president and vice president, the United State Senate, and United States Representative. Further, if the major political parties do not allow a blanket primary, the nonpartisan primary is eliminated.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The original bill would automatically provide the IRV for the offices of state legislature, state judges, president and vice president, the United States Senate and United States Representative. The substitute bill conditions the use of IRV for those offices on the major political parties not allowing a blanket primary.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available

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

Testimony For: An amazing coalition of people support instant runoff voting from all across the political spectrum. It encourages majority winners and allows for voter independence. IRV does away with the spoiler candidate problem. IRV allows voters to vote their true preference and not their fears; no votes are wasted. Cost savings will be achieved by eliminating the primary election.

Testimony Against: This would make voting too complicated and drive up costs.

Testified: Nat Holder, David Anderson, E.J. Alexander, Brent White, Coalition for IRV in WA (pro); Janet Anderson, WA Citizens for Proportional Representation (pro); Stewart Wechsler, Independent (pro); Brent McMillan, Jerry Cronk, Green Party of WA (pro); Chris Smith Freedom Socialist Party (pro); Chris Stegman, South Sound Greens (pro); Bob Bruce, King County Records and Elections (con); Mark Brown, City of Vancouver (pro); Jerry Sheehan, American Civil Liberties Union of Washington; Kris Novoselic, Joint Artists and Musicians Promotions Action Committee.