

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5122

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, February 1, 2005

Title: An act relating to nonpartisan elections for the office of secretary of state.

Brief Description: Making the office of secretary of state a nonpartisan office; allowing counties to make the county auditor position nonpartisan.

Sponsors: Senators Kastama, Jacobsen, Weinstein, Rockefeller, Kline and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 1/27/05, 2/1/05 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5122 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Kastama, Chair; Berkey, Vice Chair; Fairley, Haugen, Kline and Pridemore.

Staff: Cindy Fazio (786-7405)

Background: The office of Secretary of State is designated by statute as a partisan office along with: congressional offices; all other state offices, except judicial offices or the office of superintendent of public instruction; and all county offices, except for judicial offices or other offices where a county home rule charter provides otherwise. State offices specifically designated nonpartisan by statute are: the superintendent of public instruction; justices of the supreme court; judges of the court of appeals; judges of the superior court; and judges of the district court.

Summary of Substitute Bill: Beginning with the 2008 general election the position of Secretary of state will be nonpartisan. Candidates seeking that office in 2008 will run as nonpartisan and be qualified and elected as such.

The legislative authority of each county may enact a resolution or ordinance to declare the office of county auditor to be a nonpartisan office. Beginning six months after such a declaration, elections for county auditor must be conducted in accordance with the general law governing the election of nonpartisan offices.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The nonpartisan county auditor provision is added.

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.

Testimony For: The chief elections officer as a partisan position creates a potential for problems. An example is the election irregularities in Ohio where the top two election officer positions are partisan. Partisanship in this position in Washington seems to have had an influence in the recent election for Governor. A nonpartisan auditor would be an excellent extension of this bill.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Ruth Bennett, James Zukowski.