

VETO MESSAGE ON SB 5668-S

May 20, 1997

To the Honorable President and Members,
The Senate of the State of Washington
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am returning herewith, without my approval, Substitute Senate Bill No. 5668 entitled:

"AN ACT Relating to temporary worker building codes;"

Substitute Senate Bill 5668 would direct the Department of Health to adopt, by rule, the temporary worker building code developed by the state building code council. The intent of this new code was to encourage the development of temporary worker housing by reducing the standards of the regular building code while still meeting the basic health and safety needs of workers.

It is with difficulty that I have come to the decision to veto SSB 5668. Existing living conditions for farm workers and their families are deplorable. From April through November, there are thousands of people working the harvest in the state of Washington who live without basic housing and sanitary facilities, in conditions that our society should, and does, find unacceptable. It is my firm conviction that we must resolve the need for adequate housing for the thousands of workers who are the backbone of the agricultural economy of this state.

SSB 5668 represents a commendable effort to address this issue and to improve the living conditions of farm workers. I appreciate the hard work and good intentions of the people and the state agencies responsible for developing this proposal for temporary worker housing. However, our state can do better in meeting the basic requirements for adequate housing.

While this legislation addresses the issues related to construction of temporary housing structures, it fails to address the basic living conditions of the workers and children who would reside in these structures. There is no certainty in the requirements for insulation to protect from the heat and cold; standards for electricity; and simple provisions for occupancy, such as refrigeration for the milk and medicine for the children who will live in these structures.

Finally, SSB 5668 does not have the support or acceptance of the people it is intended to help. Farm workers and Spanish speaking people across the state have voiced their opposition to this legislation and to a building code they consider sub-standard. Without their support, leadership and commitment, I am convinced that there will be no solution to the housing problem for farm workers.

This veto should not be interpreted as the end of the process, but rather a call to continue from this point to improve this proposal so that we may bring forward a better solution to farm worker housing. This problem cannot be solved in one piece; there is a need for adequate affordable community housing for workers who are year-round residents, and a need for on-site housing for peak agricultural seasons. Farm workers, growers, farming communities and state agencies must come together on a more comprehensive housing proposal that results in good, quality housing for our agricultural workers.

For these reasons, I have vetoed Substitute Senate Bill No. 5668 in its entirety.

Respectfully submitted,
Gary Locke
Governor