

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5326

As Passed Senate, March 11, 2005

Title: An act relating to providing home rule charter cities the ability to choose their election system.

Brief Description: Providing home rule charter cities the ability to choose their election system.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Government Operations & Elections (originally sponsored by Senators Kohl-Welles, Pridemore, Esser, Kline, Weinstein, Poulsen, Finkbeiner, McAuliffe, Keiser and Spanel).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 2/17/05, 2/28/05 [DPS, DNP].
Passed Senate: 3/11/05, 29-16.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5326 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

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

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Roach, Ranking Minority Member; and Benton.

Staff: Diane Smith (786-7410)

Background: There are ten first class cities as follows: Aberdeen, Bellingham, Bremerton, Everett, Seattle, Spokane, Richland, Tacoma, Vancouver, and Yakima. Each has chosen its form of government through adoption of a local charter.

In nonpartisan primaries, the top two candidates go on to the general election. The exceptions to this are the candidates who receive a majority of all votes cast for a judicial office or for the office of state Superintendent of Public Instruction, who are the only candidates for each respective office to appear on the general election ballot.

In the general election, the candidate with the most votes wins, with no requirement of receiving a majority of the votes cast.

A system of voting called, ranked voting, or Instant Runoff Voting (IRV), generally requires the winning candidate to have the majority of the votes cast. Each voter is allowed to vote for five choices, but is not required to use all his or her choices. The voter shows his or her preference by labeling his or her first choice 1, second choice 2, and so on. 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 deactivated.

Summary of Bill: When the charter of a first class city provides for its use, a ranked voting system makes the nonpartisan primary unnecessary. The Secretary of State must assist the county auditor with implementation of the ranked voting system.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The original bill was not considered.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 16, 2005.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: This will eliminate the cost and time of the primary. It changes the tenor of campaigns in that it reduces the instances of negative campaigning. This debate is about the legislature doing what it is charged to do, and the Secretary of State will follow suit. It is now 5 1/2 years later. Vancouver has waited long enough. Minor parties at least get a chance to win office. The Secretary of State is skeptical but will make it happen.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: Katie Blinn, The Office of the Secretary of State. PRO: Janet Anderson, Washington Citizens for Proportional Representation; Jody Haug, Green Party of Washington State; Taryn Gearhart, IRVWA; Brent White, IRV.