

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6221

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, January 30, 2006

Title: An act relating to use of public funds for political purposes.

Brief Description: Revising limitations on use of public funds for political purposes.

Sponsors: Senators Franklin, Kline, Kastama, Keiser, Regala and Jacobsen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 1/12/06, 1/30/06 [DPS, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6221 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

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

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Benton and Mulliken.

Staff: Mac Nicholson (786-7445)

Background: Initiative 134, passed by the voters in 1992, regulates political contributions, campaign expenditures, and prohibits the use of public funds to finance political campaigns for state or local offices. Prior to the passage of Initiative 134, some local governments had ordinances providing the availability of public funds for political campaigns for municipal offices.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The legislative authority of a city or county may establish, through adoption of an ordinance or resolution, a program allowing the use of public funds to finance campaigns for local office. The ordinance or resolution must be submitted to a vote of the people in the form of a referendum for those jurisdictions with referendum power, or in the form of an advisory ballot for those local jurisdictions without referendum power.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The original bill just removed the prohibition on the use of public funds to finance political campaigns for local office. The substitute adds the provisions requiring adoption of an ordinance or resolution and submission to a vote of the people.

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: This bill doesn't expand any program; it just restores the ability of local jurisdictions to implement public campaign funding for local offices. Seattle and King County had public funding programs but I-134 inadvertently prohibited them. The programs were working very well, and local jurisdictions should have the option to explore them again. Public funding increases the number of candidates seeking office, increases contact between voters and the candidates, decreases the time a candidate must fundraise, and decreases the appearance of impropriety that arises during fundraising. Some local jurisdictions don't have initiative and referendum power, so requiring a vote of the people in the jurisdiction prior to implementation of the program is problematic. This is a local control issue, and there is no mandate to implement such a program.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Senator Franklin, prime sponsor; John King, Washington Public Campaigns; Lonnie Johns-Brown, League of Women Voters; David Foster, City of Seattle.