
State Government & Tribal Relations Committee

HB 1938

Brief Description: Creating the Washington state flag redesign committee.

Sponsors: Representatives Peterson, Reed and Nance.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Washington State Flag Redesign Committee to oversee the process of designing a new state flag.
- Prohibits the state flag from being redesigned without conducting a referendum asking voters whether the state should adopt the proposed new design or keep the current design.

Hearing Date: 2/18/25

Staff: Desiree Omli (786-7105).

Background:

Washington became the forty-second state of the United States on November 11, 1889. In 1914 a flag committee was assembled by the Daughters of the American Revolution, which was led by Emma Chadwick, to design a flag and submit it to the Legislature for adoption. The committee submitted its design to the Legislature in 1915—the state seal on a field of green—but it was not until 1923 that the state flag was officially adopted.

The state seal that first appeared on the flag was designed in 1889 by Olympia jeweler Charles Talcott, with assistance from his brothers. Originally, Talcott designed the seal by tracing the bottom of an ink bottle and then tracing a silver dollar as an inner circle. Next, he lettered the

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words "The Seal of the State of Washington, 1889" between the circles and pasted a postage stamp bearing a picture of George Washington in the center. Later, he discovered that the postage stamp was poorly detailed and insufficient to produce a cutting die. Charles Talcott's brother, George Talcott, instead selected a color drawing of George Washington from a packing box of "Dr. D. Jayne's Cure for Coughs & Colds" to replace the postage stamp image. In 1967 the Secretary of State commissioned graphic designer Richard Nelms to create a new insignia. Nelms selected a Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington which replaced the image of George Washington on the 1889 design of the state seal. This also prompted an update of the design of the state flag.

State law requires that the flag be of dark green silk or bunting and bear the state seal in the center. If the edges of the flag are fringed, the fringe must be gold or yellow and the same shade as the seal in the center. The state seal is encircled with the words "The Seal of the State of Washington" with the vignette of General George Washington as the central figure. Beneath the vignette it reads "1889." According to one of the sponsors of the 1923 legislation adopting the flag, the green area represents "the verdant fields of Western Washington," and the gold ring around the image of George Washington represents the "wheat areas of Eastern Washington." The Secretary of State standardized the colors for the flag in 1955.

The Washington flag is the only state flag featuring a green field and a portrait of a past President of the United States.

Summary of Bill:

The Washington State Flag Redesign Committee (Committee) is established to oversee the process of designing and adopting a new state flag. Administrative support for the committee is provided by the Arts Commission (Arts Commission). Membership of the Committee includes:

- the Director of the Arts Commission, or their designee, who will serve as the Chair;
- four legislators, one from each of the minority and majority caucuses in the Senate and House of Representatives;
- the Secretary of State, or their designee;
- one historian, appointed by the Washington State Historical Society;
- two cultural leaders, appointed by the Arts Commission;
- four tribal representatives, appointed by the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians; and
- four citizen representatives from different regions of the state, appointed by the Governor.

The Committee is responsible for soliciting feedback and suggestions from the public through outreach to inform its work, reviewing designs with an eye for historical relevance and the ability to represent the state's diverse population and landscapes, selecting no more than five designs to move to the final round of public feedback, and unanimously adopting the new design by July 1, 2028.

The Committee must submit a report to the Legislature and Governor by August 1, 2028 detailing the design of the new flag, a revised statutory description of the flag, a description of

the symbols and other meanings incorporated in the design, and detailing the next steps to adopt the new design into law.

Prior to becoming law, the proposed redesign of the state flag, and any future redesign of the state flag, must be adopted by voters through a referendum. The Committee terminates on January 1, 2029.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary fiscal note available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.