

SENATE BILL REPORT

HCR 4412

AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, MARCH 30, 1993

**Brief Description:** Appointing a poet laureate to be paid in Washington wine.

**SPONSORS:** Representatives Jacobsen, Miller, Anderson, R. Fisher and Finkbeiner

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Chairman; Drew, Vice Chairman; Loveland, and Winsley.

**Staff:** Katie Healy (786-7784)

**Hearing Dates:** March 26, 1993; March 30, 1993

**BACKGROUND:**

Washington has a thriving poetry community that includes performing poets, published poets, and academics. There is a desire to recognize the value of poetry and the contribution Washington poets make to the culture of the state.

**SUMMARY:**

The Governor appoints a Washington poet to serve as the poet laureate of the state. The poet laureate writes poetry and lofty expressions to be read at appropriate state occasions. The term of the poet laureate is two years. The salary of the poet laureate consists of one butt, approximately 126 gallons, of Washington wine per year donated by the Washington wine industry.

Before appointing the poet laureate, the Governor will confer with a nominating committee consisting of one member of the House of Representatives, one member of the Senate, and one member appointed by the Governor. The committee will seek nominations from poets, writers, poetry critics, professors of English, magazine and literary review editors, state and local arts commission members, and others exhibiting an exceptional knowledge of poetry.

**Appropriation:** none

**Revenue:** none

**Fiscal Note:** none requested

**TESTIMONY FOR:**

The payment of a butt of wine was the compensation given to poets laureate in English. The term "butler" came from the person who served the butt of wine. Since the bill has been proposed, there has been a great deal of positive acclaim. This measure would recognize the value of poets and poetry. There is a great wealth of poets here in the Northwest. Having a term for the position means that many qualified poets will be able to aspire to the state poet laureate spot. This is not the replacement of prayer, but is an acknowledgement of the power and effectiveness of excellent language. The people we thought lost come and pack poetry readings to listen, clap, cry, applaud. They go home and they write. A strong poet laureate can be a strong advocate for arts in this state, and the bill doesn't cost a penny. The Washington Wine Commission is supportive of the measure and happy to contribute the butt of wine.

**TESTIMONY AGAINST:**

Offering wine instead of a modest stipend could appear patronizing. A poet has never been able to purchase a bottle of Washington wine for a poem.

**TESTIFIED:** PRO: Representative Jacobsen, original sponsor; Paul Eillie, WA Poet's Assn.; Bart Baxter, American Academy of Poets, Red Sky Poetry Theater; Carol Gordon, NW Renaissance Poets; Victoria Chiechi, WA Wine Commission