

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5133

As Reported By House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to censorship by school districts.

Brief Description: Prohibiting censorship of United States and Washington history.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Senators Zarelli and Schow).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 4/3/97 [DP].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Johnson, Chairman; Hickel, Vice Chairman; Smith; Sterk; Sump and Talcott.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Cole, Ranking Minority Member; Keiser, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Linville; Quall and Veloria.

Staff: Joe Hauth (786-7111).

Background: Schools must provide instruction in the history of the United States. In fulfilling high school graduation requirements, public and private high school students must study the United States Constitution and the Washington State Constitution.

Summary of Bill: School boards must not censor any document, writing, speech or record related to the founding of the United States or the state of Washington because of religious references contained in the document, writing, speech or record. School boards must allow teachers to read or post such documents in a public school classroom.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: *We have worked with the American Civil Liberties Union and others to improve the language in the bill. This bill was introduced to clarify issues regarding separation of church and state and a teacher's right to use founding documents in lesson plans. The goal of the bill is to clarify the ability of a teacher to post these historical materials in the classroom.*

Testimony Against: *There is concern whether this will address every single instance, and concern for unintended consequences. There has not been a single reported instance of censorship related to this issue. What will happen if these documents are used to incite violence or unrest? The language in the bill is too broad. What is the role of school boards, if not to deal directly with the issues raised in this bill?*

Testified: Senator Zarelli, prime sponsor; and Dwayne Slate, Washington State School Directors' Association (con).