

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5460

As Passed Senate, March 18, 1997

Title: An act relating to the use of public funds.

Brief Description: Limiting the use of public funds for political activities.

Sponsors: Senators McCaslin, Deccio and Zarelli.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations: 2/11/97, 3/4/97 [DP, DNP].
Passed Senate, 3/18/97, 27-21.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators McCaslin, Chair; Hale, Vice Chair; Anderson and Horn.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Patterson and Swanson.

Staff: Eugene Green (786-7405)

Background: Most local governmental units in the state are members of associations which provide educational and legislative development resources. For example, cities and towns belong to the Association of Washington Cities, and counties and county officials belong to the Washington State Association of Counties and the Washington Association of County Officials. To support the activities of these associations, members pay dues from their general revenues, i.e. receipts from taxes and fees. Unless created by statute, these associations are treated as private entities and are not subject to audit by the State Auditor. The Auditor also considers the moneys paid by members to such private associations as no longer public, but private funds, once they have been transferred. Public and private associations representing local governmental units have, from time to time, expended funds in support of or in opposition to ballot measures.

Summary of Bill: No association, organization, or entity that derives more than 25 percent of its income from dues, assessments, or membership fees paid with public funds may provide any financing support or use of its facilities for or against a ballot proposition or candidate for public office.

No county may reimburse either the Washington State Association of Counties or the Washington Association of County Officials for contributing to political committees or for funds used as political contributions.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: None requested.

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

Testimony For: Public money should not be spent to influence election campaigns or ballot propositions.

Testimony Against: We feel it is our duty to inform the public when an issue is inimical to our interests.

Testified: Paul Telford (pro); Peter Escalante (pro); Stan Finkelstein, AWC (con); Gary Lowe, Washington Association of Counties (con); Pat Jones, Washington Public Ports (con); Alan Eichler (pro).

House Amendment(s): Associations composed of local governments and funded by local governments are prohibited from participating in any election. Such associations are allowed to provide factual information to their members regarding ballot measures, to participate in determining a collective position on ballot measures, and participate on a committee appointed to prepare arguments to appear in the voter's pamphlet regarding the ballot measure. Each association is required to submit a report to relevant legislative committees in January of each year through 1999 disclosing any such activities engaged in by the association during the previous year.