

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5517

As Passed Senate, February 17, 1998

Title: An act relating to the membership of the governing boards of the state's institutions of higher education.

Brief Description: Requiring one student member on each state institution of higher education's governing board.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators Wood, Kohl, Bauer, Patterson, Winsley, Brown, Goings, Fraser, Loveland, Benton, Sellar, Franklin and Oke).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/12/97, 2/17/97, 2/20/97 [DP, DNP]; 2/2/98, 2/5/98 [DPS].

Passed Senate, 3/11/97, 30-17.

Passed Senate, 2/17/98, 31-18.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5517 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Wood, Chair; Winsley, Vice Chair; Bauer, Hale, Kohl and Patterson.

Staff: Jean Six (786-7423)

Background: The public research institutions, the University of Washington (UW) and Washington State University (WSU), are each governed by a board of regents. Each board has nine members appointed by the Governor with the consent of the Senate to serve six-year terms.

The Evergreen State College (TESC) and the regional universities, Central Washington University (CWU), Eastern Washington University (EWU), and Western Washington University (WWU), are each governed by a seven-member board of trustees appointed by the Governor with the consent of the Senate to serve a term of six years.

The research universities allow one graduate student, one undergraduate student and one representative of the faculty senate to serve as advisory members to the boards. The advisory members are presidents of their respective associations. Advisory members do not vote, but do have a formal place on the agenda at each meeting.

The regional universities have the chair of the faculty senate and the student body president sit as advisory members to the board. CWU includes the chair of the association of administrators. EWU's board receives from the advisory members a written and an oral report at each meeting. Advisory members do not vote.

Sitting at the table with the board of trustees at TESC are the past chair of the faculty agenda committee, one student volunteer, one alumni representative, and one staff representative elected by the staff. These advisory members do not vote but take part in the discussion.

Summary of Bill: For the University of Washington and for Washington State University, the Governor, with the consent of the Senate, appoints one full-time student in good standing to the board of regents. The student is chosen from a list of at least three and not more than five names submitted to the Governor by the student governing body. The term of the student regent is for one year from June 1 until the appointment and qualification of the successor. Each board of regents is ten members, with six members constituting a quorum.

For CWU, WWU, and EWU, the Governor, with the consent of the Senate, appoints one full-time student in good standing to the board of trustees. The student is chosen from a list of at least three and not more than five names submitted to the Governor by the student governing body. The term of the student trustee is for one year from June 1 until the appointment and qualification of the successor. Each board of trustees is eight members, with five members constituting a quorum.

For TESC, the Governor, with the consent of the Senate, appoints one full-time student in good standing to the board of trustees. The student is chosen from a list of at least three and not more than five names submitted to the Governor by the student body. The term of the student trustee is for one year from June 1 until the appointment and qualification of the successor. The board of trustees is eight members, with five members constituting a quorum.

Student members will not participate in personnel matters.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: 1997: Thirty-one states currently allow students to sit on governing boards. Students believe they are investors and shareholders in the higher education institutions and as such deserve a role in the executive decisions of the governing boards. WSL believes students as voting members of governing boards does not constitute conflict of interest; and there would be no negative impact to the student body, the institution, or the state. While students agree they currently have good working relationships with the governing boards, there is no requirement that guarantees this relationship. According to WSL, a number of students have applied for membership on governing boards but no governor has appointed one. The students oppose faculty representation on the board as they believe faculty would have a conflict of interest. The students also oppose the representation of any other dedicated group. Students are citizens who believe they ought to have special consideration and a dedicated student category. Other statewide boards have dedicated memberships. Trustees nor regents are on campus every day sitting in classes, buying books, or standing in registration lines. Students should not be excluded from making decisions that affect them; students are the only reason the institutions exist; and students' votes are important.

1998: Students need access to all information that is available to the governing boards. Students are the ones who live the life of the university on a day to day basis.

Students are in full support of the language in the substitute.

We do not find valid the point of view that says a student sitting on a governing board is a conflict of interest; because students are not employees of the institution. Students believe they are shareholders.

Testimony Against: 1997: Students do not have the experience required to serve as trustees or regents. The governing boards make personnel decisions including the hiring and firing of the President. The one-year term is not long enough to learn what really is required to run a multi-million dollar organization. The one-year term leads to a very short-term look that is not appropriate. The one-year term versus the six-year term of the citizen members leads to inequity. There are a number of categories of students but only room for one member on the governing board. The current system provides for a "disinterested board" as the word trustee implies. The trustee represents the outside perspective and holds the institution in trust for the benefit of the students. An "interest board" opens the door to various dedicated positions such as faculty, staff, graduate students, students from the branch campuses, etc. Students may be very capable of serving on the boards and the Governor could appoint a student under current statute. In fact, a number of years ago a student did sit on the board for one of the regional institutions. Confidentiality of personnel issues is a concern of the administrations if students were allowed to participate in executive and other closed door meetings. Confusion may develop over who the student leaders are--the ASB president or the student member of the governing board. The current system works well. A 9-1 vote is no better than a 9-0 vote.

1998: Students should not be appointed to the boards just because they are students. Other special interest groups will attempt to follow suit. Student members on governing boards will create division in the shared governance model now operating at the institutions. Students cannot provide a long-term commitment to the governing boards.

We value student participation in decision making but we view students as beneficiaries of the trust relationship provided by an outside perspective.

Preventing student participation in personnel decisions makes the bill less objectionable but we still oppose putting students on the governing boards.

Testified: 1997: PRO: Senator Jeannette Wood, prime sponsor; Tiffany LaMonte, EWU student; Tres Gallant, WWU, WSL team; Sumeer Singla, WSU, WSL team; Shawn O'Connor, UW student; Amit Ranide, UW, WSL; Leslie Keller, WWU student; CON: Judy McNickle, WWU, Legislative Liaison; Larry Ganders, WSU, Legislative Liaison; Oliver Bangera, WSU graduate student; Kim Merriman, Legislative Liaison, TESC.

1998: PRO: Adrienne Thompson, WWU, WSL; Garrett Ferencz, UW, WSL; CON: Greg Royer, WSU; Judy McNickle, WWU; Kim Merriman, TESC.