

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6655

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Higher Education, February 5, 1998

**Title:** An act relating to institutions of higher education.

**Brief Description:** Changing the Spokane intercollegiate research and technology institute.

**Sponsors:** Senators West and Brown.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education: 2/2/98, 2/5/98 [DPS].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6655 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Wood, Chair; Winsley, Vice Chair; Bauer, Hale, Kohl, Patterson, Prince, B. Sheldon and West.

**Staff:** Jean Six (786-7423)

**Background:** In 1988, the Legislature appropriated \$800,000 for the purchase of a site in Spokane for an intercollegiate institute for research and technology. In 1989, the Legislature created the Spokane Intercollegiate Research and Technology Institute (SIRTI) designed as a cooperative venture of Eastern Washington University (EWU), Gonzaga University, Whitworth College, the community colleges of Spokane, and Washington State University (WSU). Through SIRTI, the member institutions collaborate in the offering of education and training, applied and developmental research, and business resource and support that is specifically aimed at the economic development of the Spokane area. A \$15 million, five-year grant through the federal Advanced Research Project Agency allowed SIRTI to launch and operate programs in manufacturing, healthcare/biomedical, and environmental technologies.

The education and economic development needs of Spokane are again under discussion in the Legislature, with the viability of SIRTI as an important component of that discussion.

**Summary of Substitute Bill:** The Spokane Intercollegiate Research and Technology Institute (SIRTI) is separated from the administration and oversight of the Joint Center for Higher Education (JCHE). The Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development (DCTED) is the new fiscal agent for SIRTI with the building and described property belonging to SIRTI. The mission of SIRTI continues to be the performance and commercialization of research that benefits the economic vitality of eastern Washington and the Spokane area.

SIRTI is operated as a multi-institutional education and research center providing leading edge collaborative research and technology transfer opportunities as well as direct involvement for both undergraduate and graduate students in research and industry interactions. Washington State University (WSU) is the senior research partner. Research staff are provided from among the cooperating institutions through cooperative agreements. The Higher Education Coordinating Board must approve the establishment of education programs and any facility acquisition.

Nonstate support for research activities is emphasized including the receipt of federal funds and private gifts or grants. Staff for SIRTI are employees of SIRTI.

Administration is by a board of directors including nine members representing the general public, at least six of whom have broad business experience and an understanding of high-technology, the Executive Director of the Washington Technology Institute, the Provost of Washington State University, the Provost of Eastern Washington University, the Provost of Central Washington University, the Provost of the University of Washington, an academic representative of the Spokane community colleges, and one member each representing Gonzaga University and Whitworth College.

Duties of the board of directors are defined:

- Developing operating policies
- Appointing an executive director
- Approving the annual operating budget of SIRTI
- Establishing research priorities and guaranteeing the greatest potential return on the investment
- Approving and allocating funding
- Developing, in cooperation with DCTED, a biennial work plan and five-year strategic plan consistent with statewide technology development and commercialization goals
- Coordinating the work of all collaborating institutions
- Assisting DCTED in the development of state policies regarding science and technology
- Reviewing annual reports on funded research projects
- Providing an annual report to the Governor and the Legislature
- Submitting an annual report to DCTED

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:** SIRTI may hire its own staff to operate the institute. WSU is the senior research partner. Research staff are provided from among the cooperating institutions through cooperative agreements.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 28, 1998.

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

**Testimony For:** The intent of the sponsors is to strengthen the Spokane Intercollegiate Research and Technology Institute (SIRTI) by making it an independent state agency. SIRTI is to conduct applied research as well as to be connected to the academic world. An independent board with significant business membership and a direct link to the Department

of Community, Trade, and Economic Development is vital to both technology transfer development and economic development.

The independent status of SIRTI is a good move forward for Spokane that contributes to a healthy business environment. "Focus 21," a local group promoting Spokane businesses, is in job creation mode. SIRTI will play a vital role relating to jobs.

Designation of Washington State University as the senior research partner would enhance our reputation as we seek out grants; however, it would not hurt the research activities of the other collaborating institutions. SIRTI is a recognizable entity when we seek grants, but WSU as a senior partner would give us an edge.

Including the University of Washington on the board of directors will provide additional strength to SIRTI.

The chambers of commerce organizations in the Spokane area are in agreement in support of this bill.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Testified:** PRO: Senator James West, prime sponsor; Terry Byington, American Electronics Association; President Sam Smith, WSU; Todd Mielke, Spokane Area Chambers of Commerce; Lyle Anderson, Exec. Director, SIRTI.