

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2698

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government

Title: An act relating to the process for election to Washington state and federal elective office.

Brief Description: Implementing Instant Runoff Voting.

Sponsors: Representatives Dunshee and Jarrett.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government: 2/7/02, 2/8/02 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- The House of Representatives and the Senate will convene a workgroup to evaluate a method of elections known as instant runoff voting (IRV) system and report to the appropriate legislative committees by December 15, 2002.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Romero, Chair; Miloscia, Vice Chair; McDermott, Schindler, Schmidt and Upthegrove.

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

Background:

By law, recounts for candidates of any office at any primary or election are mandatory if the difference in the number of votes between the two candidates with the most votes for the same office is not more than 0.5 percent of the total votes cast for both candidates. If the difference in votes is less than 150 votes and also less than .25 percent of the total number of votes cast for both candidates, the votes shall be recounted manually or by an alternative method agreed upon by the affected candidates (RCW 29.64.015).

If an election of any federal, state, county, city, district, or precinct officer results in a

tie, the official empowered by state law to issue the certificate of election shall give notice to the persons having the highest and equal number of votes to attend proceedings to decide by lot which of the persons shall be declared duly elected (RCW 29.62.080).

Summary of Substitute Bill:

A workgroup consisting of four members from the Senate, two from each caucus as appointed by the President of the Senate, and four members from the House of Representatives, two from each caucus as appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Efforts of the workgroup will focus on the following:

- An analysis of the IRV;
- An analysis of the efforts in other states;
- An analysis of the estimated cost of the IRV to state and local governments;
- A discussion of recommendations; and
- Analysis and discussion of other related issues to the IRV.

The workgroup will solicit input from other agencies and organizations, including the Office of the Secretary of State, the Office of Community Development, the Washington Association of County Officials, and the League of Women Voters.

Members of the workgroup shall be paid according to chapter 44.04 RCW. The Senate Committee Services and the Office of Program Research shall staff the workgroup.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The requirement for the IRV is deleted. Instead, a workgroup is formed to evaluate issues related to the IRV and is to report back to the Legislature by December 15, 2002.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: Our system is dated, is not inclusive, and needs to change. Fifty percent of eligible voters do not vote. Places where the IRV has been established have yielded better participation rates. This will increase the chances that the elected candidate would win by a majority vote. The IRV allows people to vote for their hopes and not for their fears. It is a simple, common-sense form of change in government and shows

citizens that the Legislature cares enough to allow real choice. This is a more inclusive way to elect people to office and eliminates and reduces the effects of campaign contributions. The city of Vancouver has researched the IRV and would like to incorporate it; however, without a change in statute this will not be possible.

(With concerns) Currently, there is only one company that has the software needed to count the type of ballot required for an the IRV system. None of our current systems, in current configurations, will work. Some scan systems can be updated at a cost of approximately \$400,000. The punch card systems that many of the counties use will have to be replaced at an estimated cost of \$2 million to \$5 million. If the IRV was instituted here, it would take two years to test the systems so a transition would not occur immediately. The printing costs would be very high. Alternative election systems are too sweeping and need to be thoroughly researched before any changes are made.

Testimony Against: There are difficulties associated with this bill that are hard to overcome. Election results could not be released until all absentee votes are in. The concept is confusing and transition would be difficult. A fiscal note is needed to assess the cost of replacing equipment and training and education needs.

Testified: (In support) Representative Dunshee, prime sponsor; Ivy Sacks, David John Anderson, Mark A. Goldman, Melvin E. Mackey, and Betty Capehart, Vashon-Maury Island Green Party; Brita Butler-Wall, Green Party of Seattle; David Walker, Green Party of Jefferson County; Jerry Cronk and Ann High, Coalition for Instant Runoff Voting; Jesse Brocksmith and Kelly Haughton, Libertarian Party; Cherie Davidson, League of Women's Voters; Mark Brown, city of Vancouver; Chris Stegman, South Sound Greens; Jody Grage Haug, Green Party of Washington State; Paul McClintock, American Heritage Party of Washington; Young Han, Green Party of South Snohomish County; and Brent White, Coalition for Instant Runoff Voting.

(Information only) David Elliott, Office of the Secretary of State.

(Opposed) Suzanne Sinclair, Washington State Association of County Auditor's.