

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESB 6183

As Passed Senate, May 14, 2001

Title: An act relating to primaries.

Brief Description: Revising primary election law.

Sponsors: Senators Snyder, Swecker, Kohl-Welles, Roach, Prentice, Horn, Jacobsen, Stevens, Constantine and Kline.

Brief History:

First Special Session: Passed Senate: 5/14/01, 30-19.

Staff: Eugene Green (786-7405)

Background: Washington currently has a blanket partisan primary. In a blanket primary, the candidate with the most votes for an office within his or her political party is the party's nominee. Any voter may vote for any one candidate for a partisan office regardless of the candidate's or the voter's party affiliation. A voter may vote for candidates affiliated with one political party for one office and vote for a candidate affiliated with another political party for another office.

Major political parties may fill vacancies on the party ticket because of the death or disqualification of a candidate or because no one filed to run for the office.

A minor political party's candidate must receive 1 percent of the vote for that office at the primary in order to advance to the general election.

Summary of Bill: "Primary" is defined as a statutory procedure held before a general election by which each voter is permitted to cast a vote for his or her preferred candidate for each office appearing on the ballot, without any limitation based on party preference or affiliation, of either the voter or the candidate, with the result qualifying not more than two candidates for each office to appear on the general election ballot.

A primary may not be used to select nominees of a political party. If a candidate expresses a party preference on his or her declaration of candidacy, then the preference is listed for the candidate on the primary and general election ballots. Each candidate who does not express a preference for a political party is listed as an independent candidate on the primary and general election ballots. Party preferences are listed for the information of voters only, and may not be used for any purpose relating to the conduct, canvassing, or certification of the primary, and may in no way limit the options available to voters in deciding for whom to cast a vote.

Under no circumstances may an individual be required to affiliate with, join, adhere to, express faith in, or declare a preference for, a political party or organization upon registering to vote.

Changes are made to the role of political parties in filling voids and vacancies in primary elections.

The requirement that minor parties hold nominating conventions is repealed. Minor party and independent candidates have the same ballot access as major party candidates.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on June 1, 2001.