

VETO MESSAGE ON SB 5143

May 15, 2001

To the Honorable President and Members,
The Senate of the State of Washington
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am returning herewith, without my approval as to sections 1 and 2, Engrossed Senate Bill No. 5143 entitled:

"AN ACT Relating to the Washington state patrol retirement system retirement and survivor benefits;"

Engrossed Senate Bill No. 5143 restructures the Washington State Patrol retirement plan. It increases cost-of-living adjustments, reduces contribution rates and makes several other worthwhile changes.

Sections 1 and 2 of the bill would have created a new "Plan II" that would have greatly reduced non-duty disability benefits for newly hired Washington State Patrol officers. While I understand the legislature's desire for uniformity among public pension systems, I think these changes require further consideration.

While similar benefit provisions exist for other state employees who are members of Plan II retirement systems, those employees are also eligible for disability coverage through the social security system. State Patrol officers are not covered by social security, and the new provisions proposed in this bill would have left them and their families vulnerable. All State Patrol officers should be assured of benefits that are at least equal to those of other state employees.

People who serve the state deserve fair and equitable protection against loss of their ability to work. This gap could be addressed in a number of ways, and I am willing to consider alternative approaches to meeting this need. I would be happy to work with the legislature in developing a revised plan.

In the meantime, however, drastically reducing the disability coverage for the newest members of the Washington State Patrol without due consideration of how it will be replaced is too great a risk.

For these reasons, I have vetoed sections 1 and 2 of Engrossed Senate Bill No. 5143.

With the exception of sections 1 and 2, Engrossed Senate Bill No. 5143 is approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Gary Locke
Governor