

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1155

As Reported by House Committee On:

State Government

Title: An act relating to a pilot project for military and overseas voters to vote over the Internet.

Brief Description: Authorizing a pilot project for military and overseas voters to vote over the Internet.

Sponsors: Representatives Hunt, Armstrong, Ruderman, McDermott, Tom, Nixon, Wallace, Shabro, Haigh and Rockefeller; by request of Secretary of State.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government: 1/21/03, 1/31/03 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes the state to participate in a pilot project for military and overseas voters to vote over the Internet.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Haigh, Chair; Armstrong, Ranking Minority Member; Shabro, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Hunt, McDermott, Nixon, Tom and Wallace.

Staff: Anne Warwick (786-7291).

Background:

All service and overseas voting is currently conducted by absentee mail ballot. The ballots must be postmarked no later than election day and must reach the county auditor before the results are certified in order for the votes to count. Certification occurs no later than 10 days after a primary or special election and no later than 15 days after a general election. "Service voter" is defined as any voter of the state who is a member of the armed forces in active service, a student or faculty member of a United States military academy, a member of the merchant marines, a member of a religious group or

welfare agency officially serving with the armed forces, or a participant in the address confidentiality program. "Overseas voter" is defined as any voter of the state outside the territorial limits of the United States.

The National Defense Authorization Act of 2002 (Sec. 1604) requires the Secretary of Defense to carry out a demonstration project under which absent uniformed voters are permitted to cast ballots in the regularly scheduled general election for November 2004 through an electronic voting system. The law requires that the demonstration project be conducted with a sufficient number of participants to ensure that the results are reliable.

Summary of Bill:

Notwithstanding existing election laws in Title 29 RCW, a county may participate in any pilot project sanctioned by the Secretary of State and in compliance with standards and regulations established by the Federal Voting Assistance Program and the United States Department of Defense to allow service and overseas voters to register and cast their votes electronically, including over the Internet or the World Wide Web. The project is only open to those service and overseas voters who fit the existing definitions of those terms. The votes must be cast and counted in conformity with the provisions of Title 29 RCW. Election officials must rely upon the procedures established by the United States Department of Defense for security, secrecy, and validation of votes, and are not subject to civil liability or criminal penalty for following such procedures. Votes transmitted over an electronic medium using the Internet or the World Wide Web are subject to a recount or election contest but not on the grounds that the vote is invalid or suspect because it was cast electronically.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

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

Testimony For: Washington has a large military voting population. The United States Department of Defense has created a pilot project, which allows military voters in Washington to vote over the Internet. Thirteen states have been selected/requested participation in the pilot project. Using the technology available to the Department of Defense will safeguard against many security and secrecy issues involved with Internet voting.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Hunt, sponsor; Sam Reed, Secretary of State; and Dean

Logan, Director of Elections.