

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5278

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, January 21, 2008

Title: An act relating to use of public funds for political purposes.

Brief Description: Concerning use of public funds to finance campaigns for local office.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Government Operations & Elections (originally sponsored by Senators Franklin, Kastama, Kline, Spanel, Keiser, Kohl-Welles, McAuliffe, Regala, Pridemore, Poulsen, Fraser, Rasmussen and Rockefeller).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 2/01/07, 2/15/07 [DPS, DNP]; 1/17/08, 1/21/08 [DP2S, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: That Second Substitute Senate Bill No. 5278 be substituted therefor, and the second substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Fairley, Chair; Oemig, Vice Chair; Kline, McDermott and Pridemore.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Roach, Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Sharon Swanson (786-7447)

Background: Initiative 134, passed by the voters in 1992, regulates political contributions and campaign expenditures, and prohibits the use of public funds to finance political campaigns for state or local offices. Prior to the passage of Initiative 134, some local governments had ordinances providing the availability of public funds for political campaigns for municipal offices.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Second Substitute): The ban on the use of public funds for local elections is removed. The legislative authority of any county, city, town, or district is authorized to establish a program allowing the use of public funds to finance campaigns for elective offices of its governments through adoption of an ordinance or resolution. The ordinance or resolution must be submitted to and approved by a vote of the people at the next general election in the form of a referendum for those jurisdictions that have referendum power, and in the form of an advisory ballot for those jurisdictions without referendum power. A county, city, town, or district that establishes a program to publicly finance local

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office political campaigns may only use funds derived from local sources to fund the program.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE (Recommended Second Substitute — Passed Committee): Removes language limiting the use of public funds to cities only. Clarifies that the public funds available for local elections must come from local sources and not state monies. Requires a vote of the people for any ordinance or resolution to allow the use of public funds to pass.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE (Proposed Second Substitute — Heard in Committee): Adds that the program the cities establish must be through adoption of an ordinance or resolution. The ordinance or resolution must be submitted to and approved by a vote of the people at the next general election in the form of a referendum for those cities that have referendum power, and in the form of an advisory ballot for those cities without referendum power.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE (Proposed First Substitute): The use of public funds for campaigns to cities who wish to establish a program is limited.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Proposed Second Substitute (Heard in Committee): PRO: We support removing the ban on public funds for local elections. The bill would address the problem of persons with great wealth, or with wealthy friends, can run. We have segments of society that are voiceless and powerless. We should give the option of public financing to level the playing field. We urge the committee to drop the provision limiting this to cities only. Leave it as a choice for all local jurisdictions. We urge the committee to reject any requirement for a local referendum or an advisory ballot. Special interests often trumps the public will. A local choice local options bill is a good idea. Requiring a local referendum is an unnecessary financial burden on local jurisdictions. This bill is not a mandate, it simply provides the option for local governments to consider the use of public funds if they choose. There is a dramatic decline in the number of contributors to city council races in Seattle. Currently, there is slightly more than 7,000 contributors giving less than 100 dollars. This is a decline of nearly 4,000 contributors in nearly four years. The costs of races are increasing dramatically. It is very difficult for candidates to raise the necessary money. In many instances, candidates need to raise 250,000 dollars or more to be competitive.

OTHER: Opposed the bill last year. Opposed to the use of any public funds to finance campaigns. People should use grass roots efforts to go out into their communities and meet people and raise the money that way. We oppose any use of tax money to finance campaigns. If there is an amendment to limit this to cities and require a vote of the people we would be neutral on the bill.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Wayne Barnett, Seattle Ethics and Elections Committee; Craig Salins, Washington Public Campaigns; Barbara Settle, League of Women Voters; Blair Anundsen, Washington Public Interest Research Group.

OTHER: Christina Bridston, Washington Association of County Officials.