

## LIS526 – Gabor Por – Observation Assignment – 4/21/2007

I observed the March 27, 2007 meeting of the **Washington State House [Committee on State Government and Tribal Affairs](#)**. Because of my tight work schedule I could not personally attend the meeting, but watched its video archive at [TVW.org](#). As a matter of fact I chose the Washington State House as my target, because I found this excellent archive, going back ten years. My first choice was Seattle City Council meetings, but those are not available on the web. The streaming video, the streaming audio (in two formats) and the downloadable audio was all made available on the website the day after the meeting.

The meeting was chaired by **Sam Hunt** (D). The other eight representatives of the committee was also present: Sherry Appleton (Vice Chair, D), Bruce Chandler (Ranking Minority Member, R), Mike Armstrong (Asst Ranking Minority Member, R), Tami Green (D), Joel Kretz (R), Joe McDermott (D), Mark Miloscia (D), and Timm Ormsby (D). The four staff members were also there: Marsha Reilly (Research Analyst), Colleen Kerr (Counsel), Alison Hellberg (Legal Fellow), and Cindy Cobb (Legislative Assistant). Besides Mr. Hunt Ms. Kerr worked the hardest in the meeting, because she had to read and summarize the various bills to be discussed. I admire not just the speed and accuracy she introduced those bills but also her preparedness she could answer clarifying questions.

The meeting started at 10 AM. Its first part lasted 67 minutes and consisted of discussions and public hearings on five bills. After a five minute break the committee reconvened for another forty minutes and did a quick executive session, where they voted on three previously discussed bills (They were supposed to vote on a fourth one but ran out of time.) Just for the record, these are the bills they voted on and passed with a majority:

- ESB 5508 - Providing for economic development project permitting.
- ESB 5513 - Establishing a state government efficiency hotline.
- 2SSB 5122 - Preserving regulatory assistance provisions.

All three went to a different Committee of the House next day and later to the floor. By now two of them became laws, the governor signed them off. The third one (ESB5508) also passed and has been delivered to the governor to be signed.

The majority of the time was spent on discussing and hearing pro and con testimonies on the following five bills (actually voting on them was scheduled for later meeting):

- **[SB 5561](#)** (PDF, [History](#)) - **Allowing voter registration up to and on electionday.**

This was the most interesting part of the hearing. Auditors and election officers voiced their opinion that it would be advantageous for the public but they would need more personal and funding to execute this bill in counties with large populations. The presenters also brought US wide statistics comparing states where voters can register on the same day with others they cannot. The voting rate in the former is significantly higher. The possibility of voter fraud was mentioned as counter argument.

- **[SSB 5566](#)** (PDF, [History](#)) - **Providing for privacy protection for certain voter registration information.**

This bill is essentially about the visibility and "copyability" of the voters' signature and phone number on the security flap of the envelope. The debate got heated when one senator was saying that 600,000 signatures were scanned and posted online, because of this security hole; while another senator called this apocryphal, because only 6 (yes six) was actually shown at a previous hearing.

- **[ESB 6128](#)** (PDF, [History](#)) - **Requiring the naming of the person or persons authorized to make expenditures on behalf of a candidate or committee.**

The senators had such a widely different understanding what this bill was about that they went back and forth trying to figure out what they are supposed to vote about. It is either about the process of appointing people other than the treasurer who can spend money in a political campaign; or it is about whether a person can perform "ministerial" functions (which apparently includes clerical ones) to more than one campaign at the same time. I got lost too.

- **[SSB 5869](#)** (PDF, [History](#)) - **Monitoring personal information collected by state agencies.**

This was quickly passed, because it just sets up a study to monitor what "personally identifiable information" the government actually collects, so later they could decide whether they need to collect those at all.

- **[ESSB 5770](#)** (PDF, [History](#)) - **Changing public works provisions for institutions of higher education.**

Contractors like electricians wanted to have the highest possible bid for their maintenance work increased, to follow inflation. Their view was supported by the present representatives of schools.

*Legend:* SB stands for Senate Bill. The "E" signifies Engrossed bills, and the "S" is for Substitute bills.

I found the style of the chair, Sam Hunt, charming. He had a great sense of humor and kept the meeting going. I was also presently surprised at the jovial atmosphere, between Democrats and Republicans. It made me reinforce what I already knew: the media reports only "newsworthy" items, and for them conflict is more interesting than the everyday friendly cooperation of the Senators.

My other observation is about how hard work being a legislator is. They had to be prepared on 5-10 bills, ask relevant questions, formulate their own opinion and vote accordingly. It requires a tremendous effort to do good and conscientious work. I look up to them more now.

It was interesting to hear the pro and con arguments for the EDR (Election Day Registration) bill. On their own they all sounded reasonable. Yet they conflicted with each other. It was a case where everybody was right, but decision one way or another had to be made, which would make half of the people unhappy. I am glad I had the opportunity to learn about the process.

P.s. More details are available at the "History" links of the five bills discussed at length, including what happened after the hearing I watched.