

Senate Government Operations and Political Subdivisions Committee
March 4th, 2025

Bill: 1st substitute HB 250 – Public Employee Gender-specific Language Requirements

Sponsor: Representative Nicholeen P. Peck

Floor Sponsor: Senator Daniel McCay

UASD Position: Tracking

This Bill prohibits certain employment action against a public employee in relation to gender-specific language.

Discussion: Representative Peck explained that this Bill was originally introduced last year by former Representative Tim Jimenez, who participated in the presentation. Tim Jimenez shared that some of his former constituents were concerned about losing their jobs for misgendering a coworker or employee and viewed being required to use someone's preferred pronouns as an infringement on free speech. The Bill aims to address this issue.

Carlos Jimenez, presenting alongside the sponsor, shared his experiences with students requesting to be referred to by genders different from those listed on their records, which he found challenging.

Senator Blouin asked how the Bill relates to religion. The sponsor explained that some individuals hold strong religious beliefs regarding the use of gender-specific pronouns, and many of these beliefs are rooted in religious teachings. Senator Blouin spoke in opposition to the Bill. Senator Thatcher also voiced opposition, raising concerns that the Bill could allow teachers to impose their personal beliefs on students.

The Worldwide Organization for Women expressed support for the Bill, while Equality Utah opposed it. Many members of the public provided testimony both in support of and against the Bill.

Yeas: 2

Nays: 3

N/V: 2

Outcome: 1st substitute HB 250 failed to pass out of the Committee.

Bill: 1st substitute HB 504 – Financial and Conflict of Interest Disclosures by Candidates Amendments

Sponsor: Representative Lisa Shepherd

Floor Sponsor: Senator Ronald M. Winterton

UASD Position: Tracking

This Bill amends provisions related to campaign finance and conflict of interest disclosures.

Discussion: Representative Shepherd explained that this Bill modifies financial and conflict of interest reporting requirements for candidates seeking election or appointment to a midterm vacancy. It also introduces new reporting requirements for cities and counties. The sponsor

emphasized that the Bill aims to increase transparency and establish consistent reporting standards for all elected officials in the state.

She noted that beginning on line 1937, the Bill allows candidates to exclude spousal information from their disclosures unless there is a known direct conflict of interest. Additionally, candidates or their spouses who are considered at risk have the option to redact certain information for privacy and safety reasons.

Senator Thatcher expressed that he would have preferred for the Bill to go through the interim process but nonetheless supported its intent. Robert Axton, Chair of the Utah Republican Party, spoke in favor of the Bill. No further discussion followed.

Yeas: 7

Nays: 0

N/V: 0

Outcome: 1st substitute HB 504 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.

Bill: 2nd substitute HB 445 – Revisions to Election Law

Sponsor: Representative Doug Fiefia

Floor Sponsor: Senator Daniel McCay

UASD Position: Tracking

This Bill amends provisions relating to elections.

Discussion: Representative Fiefia explained that this Bill focuses on improving the timeliness of election result reporting by establishing a standardized statewide reporting schedule. It also implements statewide election technology equipment standards and requires that all mail-in ballots be received by the time polls close on election day. Additionally, the Bill sets deadlines for voter registration and ballot requests, closing voter registration 21 days before the election and requiring mail-in ballot requests to be submitted no later than 14 days before election day. The sponsor emphasized that same-day registration and early voting would remain unchanged. He believed that streamlining these processes would lead to more accurate and efficient election results and reiterated that same-day voter registration would not be eliminated.

Ricky Hatch, Weber County Clerk, spoke on behalf of the Utah Association of Counties and the Utah Municipal Clerks Association, expressing opposition to the Bill due to concerns that it would reduce their ability to meet essential deadlines. The Salt Lake County Clerk echoed these concerns, and the League of Women Voters also spoke in opposition. Public opinion was divided, with various members of the public speaking both in support of and against the Bill. Robert Axton, Chair of the Republican Party, spoke in favor of the Bill.

Senator Thatcher raised concerns about the unfunded mandate included in the Bill, warning that it could increase error rates and decrease voter participation. He encouraged the sponsor to continue refining the Bill during the interim and motioned to hold it in Committee.

Yeas: 6
Nays: 1
N/V: 0

Outcome: 2nd substitute HB 445 was held in the Committee.

Bill: 4th substitute HB 270 – Voter Registration Records Amendments

Sponsor: Representative Trevor Lee

Floor Sponsor: Senator John D. Johnson

UASD Position: Support

This Bill amends provisions relating to voter registration records.

Discussion: Representative Lee presented the Bill alongside Brian McKenzie, Davis County Clerk, and Robert Axton, Chair of the Utah Republican Party. The Committee adopted the 4th substitute of the Bill, and the sponsor outlined the key changes during his presentation. Mr. McKenzie emphasized that voter registration and privacy had become significant issues in the state. He highlighted the collaborative efforts with stakeholders to create a balanced approach to these concerns. The Bill modifies and recodifies provisions related to voter registration record accessibility, determining access based on the requester's capacity while also establishing new privacy protections. The sponsor assured that at-risk individuals would have safeguards under the Bill.

The Bill requires election officers to notify affected voters about any reclassification of records and provides them with an opportunity to apply for extra privacy protections. It introduces new voter identification numbers, strengthens procedures for removing deceased individuals from voter registration records, and modifies penalties for the unlawful disclosure of voter registration information. Mr. McKenzie noted that delaying implementation until 2027 would help reduce the fiscal note and allow changes to be incorporated into the new system.

Mr. Axton spoke about how the Bill would enhance election integrity and encourage greater public engagement in the voting process. Senator Thatcher voiced his support for the Bill. Senator Vickers inquired about the impact of the privacy provisions on political parties. Mr. McKenzie explained that while the Bill enhances privacy protections for all voters, political parties would still have access to voter names but not additional identifying information.

The Utah Legislative Watch and the Utah County Clerk spoke in favor of the Bill. Several members of the public expressed both support and opposition.

Yeas: 6
Nays: 0
N/V: 1

Outcome: 4th substitute HB 270 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.

Bill: 4th substitute HB 351 – Election Day Amendments

Sponsor: Representative Ryan D. Wilcox

Floor Sponsor: Senator Keven J. Stratton

UASD Position: Tracking

This Bill establishes Election Day as a state holiday.

Discussion: Representative Wilcox stated that this Bill establishes Election Day as a state holiday. He explained that the intent is to elevate the significance of Election Day, encouraging more people to participate in voting. He also noted that all financial elements of the Bill had been removed. Senator Vickers asked whether the sponsor still believed the Bill would have a positive impact, given that most voters in the state primarily vote by mail. The sponsor expressed hope that making Election Day a state holiday would help facilitate voter participation. No further discussion followed.

Yeas: 5

Nays: 1

N/V: 1

Outcome: 4th substitute HB 351 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.
