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Bill to ease finance form filings

Legislation to allow those running to submit donation data electronically or on paper

By Alicia Yager

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A bill which would allow for both electronic and paper filing for campaign finance records is poised for a committee vote Tuesday.

The bill, authored by Sen. Dave Hansen, D-Green Bay, and Sen. Mike Ellis, R-Neenah, will allow candidates whose total accumulated donations exceed \$20,000 to submit either electronic or paper copies of their financial reports to the Government Accountability Board.

The Senate Committee on Ethics Reform and Government Operations will hold an executive session Tuesday to vote whether or not to pass the bill out of committee and to the Senate floor.

According to Hansen, the goal of this bipartisan bill is to simplify the campaign finance report process.

“The whole idea is to make it easier for candidates to run,” Hansen said. “The current format used by [GAB] is quite complicated and a lot of people said it takes a lot of time to go through on the computer. We want option of either electronic or paper.”

Hansen also said many senior citizens are not as computer literate as younger generations and those more than 60 years old may feel more discouraged to run for office because of this daunting reporting system.

He added the paper reporting document, which is six pages long and lists campaign donors, is a very simple process whereas the electronic version is confusing and prone to mistakes.

“Some finance reports have been goofed up, and you may have done nothing wrong but you look bad anyway,” Hansen said. “Hopefully down the road when the computer system is less complicated we can just use that, but in the interim we need another option.”

Hansen added he is confident the bill will pass out both the committee and the Senate.

Senate President Fred Risser, D-Madison, chair of the committee and co-sponsor of the bill, shared the same optimistic view of the bill’s future.

“I think there is enough feeling that the GAB hasn’t gotten its act together yet so the bill will be approved by committee and acted on this fall,” Risser said.

Risser said GAB Director and General Counsel Kevin Kennedy made an appearance at a committee meeting for information purposes only — not for or against the bill.

GAB spokesperson Mike Haas said the GAB itself has no position on the bill and is just monitoring its status as a responsible agency should. He added the GAB will administer state statutes and laws to provide the greatest

transparency in campaign financing.

Sen. Alan Lasee, R-De Pere, committee member and bill sponsor, said the bill attempts to simplify the reporting process — what the GAB should have already done before.

“They had years to develop this program, and it’s a program so flawed and difficult for candidates and their treasurers that they are discouraged,” Lasee said.

Lasee said he also thinks the Senate will pass the bill because all senators have to file campaign finance reports and a large number of them have had difficulty with the current system.

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