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Change of gov't bill amended in Senate, then held



Joe Pyrah - DAILY HERALD

One senator's consensus is another's uninformed majority.

On Monday, Sen. Howard Stephenson, R-Draper, argued the latter in changing a bill intended to clear up Utah's forms of city government.

Stephenson echoed Lehi Mayor Howard Johnson, who was nearly the last man standing against Senate Bill 20, which would remove the power of city councils to change their form of government without a vote of the people. The issue has come up in several cities in recent years, including Lehi. Bluffdale went to court over a change, and a citizen referendum reversed a change by Syracuse's council.

Johnson's and Stephenson's concern was that Senate Bill 20 still allowed councils to take powers away from a mayor without a change of government.

"When your city is the one where the city council decides to strip the power of the mayor ... then you have the fights, the civil wars that occur in the cities we've heard about in the news," Stephenson said.

He proposed an amendment to the bill that would force a vote of the people any time a council wanted to remove a mayoral power.

Bill sponsor Sen. Carlene Walker, R-Salt Lake City, repeatedly said her bill was a consensus bill backed by the Utah League of Cities and Towns and most of the state's mayors.

"If you look at those complaining, it is a very small minority," she said. "I'm sorry that they don't understand."

But several senators said the list of mayors voicing concerns is growing.

"We need to clarify that councils cannot simply press their thumbs on the scale and advantage

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bureaucracy over democracy," said Sen. Mark Madsen, R-Eagle Mountain.

Walker took a jab at opposing mayors, saying they were under the impression that they were a Rocky Anderson-type, with broad powers.

"Some of these mayors are running thinking they are a strong mayor," she said referring to the form of government that cities like Provo have. "This is a big mistake to make every small change in city government go to a vote of the people."

Walker's plea failed and Stephenson's amendment passed 15-10.

Walker then circled the bill, which takes it out of play until she brings it back.

Senate Bill 20, Municipal Government Amendments

Sponsor: Sen. Carlene Walker, R-Salt Lake City

This bill rewrites and reorganizes provisions relating to forms of municipal government and municipal administration.

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