

Senate approves bill raising bar for recounts

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Losing candidates would face a higher bar to seek a recount under legislation the Senate approved today that would have prevented Green Party presidential contender Jill Stein from forcing one in 2016.

Currently, any candidates can petition for a recount regardless of how much they trail the winner. Stein finished a distant fourth with 1 percent of the vote in last year's presidential race, but successfully sought a recount of Wisconsin's results, confirming Donald Trump's victory here.

Under the bill, in an election with more than 4,000 votes cast, anyone seeking a recount must have finished no more than 1 percent behind the leading candidate. In elections with 4,000 or fewer votes, the trailing candidate could only be no more than 40 behind.

The bill, approved 20-13 along party lines with Republicans all in favor, would maintain current law that the candidate seeking a recount must pay the fee to perform one if the winning margin is more than 0.25 percent of the total votes cast in the race.

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An amendment to the bill would keep the current deadline for most contests to request a recount, but move it up by two days for presidential races. The new deadline for a presidential race would be the first business day following the Election Commission receiving the final report from county boards of canvass on the results.

The Senate added an amendment of its own, which means the bill has to go back to the Assembly for concurrence before the gov could sign it.

Sen. Mark Miller, D-Monona, acknowledged some were unhappy with last fall's recount from someone who had "no chance in hell" of winning once it was over. But he said there has been a crisis of confidence in U.S. elections between poorly run ones in other jurisdictions and reports of foreign interference in the 2016 presidential race.

He said the option off requesting a recount "should be open to any concerned citizen or organization who wants to verify the results if they're willing to pay for it."