I support voting reform but am opposed to SB 791. Better voting methods are available which are easier to implement, and the problems of IRV are too big to ignore. It's not enough to simply rank the candidates if the ballots are not counted fairly. The runoff elimination process of "ranked choice" "instant-runoff voting" is a complicated shell-game of shuffling ballots which leaves voters without a clear idea of how the winner won. There are simpler and more transparent methods, which better deliver on the claims made for IRV.

In this proposed method, the runoff process continually reassigns a voter's 1st choice, but has major flaws such as:

* discarded data - 2nd ranks are uncounted in many cases
* exhausted ballots - many voters are left out of the final round
* spoiled ballots - people make mistakes which the method does not tolerate

We need an election method which allows many groups with diverse ideas to reach a conclusion which most people agree is the most supported. That conclusion should be easily verified and understood. If we want to be less divided, the contest should be about getting the most support rather than just half. Approval and scored methods such as STAR could raise the level of competition to debate between two candidates with strong support from more than a majority, and the data will clearly reflect that.

In today's testimony, every objection about STAR voting was based on a contrived example and yet the advocates of IRV did not address common objections to the method this bill proposes, including:

1. your 2nd-choice vote might not be counted if eliminated before your 1st choice, and

2. multiple candidates cannot be equally ranked, truncating the opinion of voters to a subset of the field in larger elections and means that ballots are more easily spoiled by accident.

Those who spoke in favor of ranked choice repeated the same unsupported promises and the objections to STAR voting were all based on the same contrived example, where a majority of voters uses less than the full 5-star range, scoring their top preference only 2 or 3. In reality, people are not confused about how to use it and the instructions say to score your favorite 5 stars. As ballot confusion goes, ranking 5 or more candidates in RCV's distinct order without mistakes would be a more widespread problem and tends to disproportionately impact historically marginalized voters. Even if a STAR ballot is underused, every voter still gets a full single vote in the automatic runoff according to their preference between the top two candidates. The winner is defined as the candidate from the top two who was preferred by the most voters.

Proposals to correct the ranked choice counting still fail to be as simple and easy to follow as the STAR voting math: which is simply adding each candidate's total score, then a count of each voter's preference between the top two candidates. This allows everyone to understand and easily follow or verify how votes add between precincts, or to summarize the will of the voters in a district. This summary of results was raised by Senator Golden as a desired outcome, but it is not delivered by RCV in most implementations, and this bill would need to specify that all ballot data must always be counted, a significant implementation detail.

St. Louis recently adopted an open approval primary with a second top-two runoff election. This is another example of a simple method with the same basic math that everyone can follow: count how many voters support each candidate, and the two with the most points go to the runoff election. This would be a small incremental change from our current process, and a good stopgap but would not eliminate the low-turnout primary. STAR voting on the other hand would give representative results even in a crowded single election.

Please pass HB 3250 STAR Voting and/or the HB 3241 Task Force bill to study these issues in-depth.

Thanks,
Eric Wilhelm