Testimony in opposition to HB 2004

Despite being a long-time advocate of RCV here in New Mexico, I am regretfully writing to express my opposition to HB 2004. I recently served as an expert witness for a bill presented to the NM legislature that would have put in place an election system similar to that adopted in Alaska (open nonpartisan primaries followed by RCV for the general election). One of the strongest objections raised to the bill by committee members was its use of RCV.

Because I very much want to see NM adopt a system like Alaska's, I have been digging more deeply into RCV to figure out why it has been the subject of so much criticism. This led me to the Equal Vote Coalition website, which compares a number of voting methods, including plurality, RCV, and three newly invented voting methods: approval, SCORE, and STAR voting. It turns out that STAR voting has the highest Voter Satisfaction Efficiency, according to a study carried by Jameson Quinn, Harvard Ph.D. and former board member of the Center for Election Science, and it appears to overcome many of the problems with RCV.

One of the biggest problems with RCV, as others have observed, is that it does not completely get rid of the spoiler effect. This helps to explain why it has been overturned soon after it was adopted in many localities, including Burlington, VT. Unfortunately, this also turned out to be the case in the 2022 special election held in Alaska using RCV. Even though Mary Peltola was far ahead in the first round, thus would have won outright in the plurality system, Nick Begich would have won in a head-to-head race with either Palin or Peltola. It also helps to explain why RCV is now the subject of so much ire on the part of Republicans, with opposition to RCV now being an official part of their party platform. Unfortunately, this means that its adoption by other states is likely to exacerbate the problem of political polarization rather than reduce it.

Thus I would urge Oregon to reject HB 2004 so that voters have the chance to learn about newer voting systems that improve upon RCV. Personally, I would like to see New Mexico adopt a system similar to that put in place in Alaska, but using STAR voting in place of RCV. STAR voting has the advantage of being easy to understand, since it is the same way we evaluate products on Amazon, Netflix, and other websites by looking at their star rating. It also retains the most valuable feature of RCV, by applying instant runoff to the two top candidates. Because no ballots are discarded before the final round, every ballot is counted in the final round, thus ensuring that the winner is actually preferred by a majority of voters.

I strongly support the efforts of the Equal Vote Coalition to get the STAR voting system on the ballot in Oregon, and I hope that you will reject HB 2004 in order to give them the time to collect enough signatures so that it can appear on the ballot in the fall.

Thank you,
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