



Alternate Voting Processes Study *Background Information*

PREPARED FOR LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF FLORIDA BY THE
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE ST. PETERSBURG AREA
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Issues Related to Alternative Voting Systems in Other States

Here continues information about various voting systems for the LWVF study adopted in May 2005. Parts 1 through 6 are from the LWV of Minnesota study of 2004 when they adopted a position on the subject. Part 7 deals with Florida's voting systems. Here in part 8 we look into information about systems in other states. It was researched and written by members of the League of Women Voters of the St. Petersburg Area.

Southern States Employ Ranked-Choice Voting to Meet Short Timetables

Military and overseas voters can participate in run-offs despite sluggish mail

By Meg Coody and Courtney McRae, electionline.org

Getting absentee ballots to far-off U.S. soldiers and citizens in Iraq, Afghanistan and South Korea is a challenge. Foreign mail services can be unreliable and slow, and inevitably, some ballots get delayed or lost.

But printing, mailing, casting and returning a ballot for a run-off election in as little time as a few weeks? Nearly impossible.

The compressed time between primaries and run-off votes in many Southern states have prompted lawmakers and election officials to find creative ways to ensure that voters in distant locales can participate fully in the vote — and to respond to U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) complaints about violating some

States: Arkansas, Louisiana and Arkansas
Municipalities: San Francisco, Berkeley,
Calif., and Burlington, Vt.

overseas' voters access to participation in a run-off election.

States have responded to complaints that their election time frame violates the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA), which protects the voting rights of members of the military, their families and other Americans living overseas.

South Carolina, Louisiana and Arkansas

South Carolina joined Louisiana and Arkansas by providing citizens in the military with a ranked-choice voting system, thereby eliminating the need to vote again in the case of a runoff. Under the new system, UOCAVA voters receive ballots in which they rank candidates based on preference.

South Carolina and Louisiana also extend the opportunity to all citizens living abroad. North Carolina boasts its own particular solution — mailing both the primary and primary run-off ballots at the same time making runoff ballots more accessible if needed, while Alabama simply expanded the period between elections from three to five weeks to address the problem.

Tar Heel State voters falling under UOCAVA receive a blank write-in ballot along with a regular, pre-printed primary ballot to return with their second candidate preferences in the event of a run-off.

“We are pleased to see a demonstrated commitment by the Alabama, North Carolina and South Carolina officials to assure that military members

and overseas voters have a meaningful opportunity to participate in the state's second primary elections," said Wan J. Kim, assistant attorney general for DOJ's Civil Rights Division in a press release. "These measures provide a permanent solution to the difficulties created by their previous run-off schedules, and resolve our concerns about the rights of military and overseas voters to have their ballots counted in all future primary run-off elections."

The U.S. Department of Defense Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), the agency that administers UOCAVA, does not take a firm stance on the merits of instant run-off voting [IRV]. "The Department's primary concern is that overseas military and civilians are able to exercise their right to vote" said an FVAP defense spokesperson. "We are not taking a position on whether IRV should be made available for overseas military and civil personnel."

South Carolina

States stressed different priorities when crafting a change to election plans. "IRV was considered because the General Assembly had a strong desire to maintain the current time frame between the primary and run-offs," said Marci Andino, executive director of South Carolina's State Election Commission. "IRV was the only option that would allow this."

Lawmakers in the state responded quickly to a letter from DOJ threatening legal action if the voting rights of UOCAVA voters were not protected in the run-off. A month after receiving the complaint, lawmakers passed a bill implementing the voting method.

With the system, if no candidate receives a majority of the votes based on voters' first choices, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. The votes are then recalculated using the second choices of voters who originally favored the eliminated candidate. This process is repeated until a candidate receives a majority.

Arkansas and Louisiana

Arkansas and Louisiana adopted the ranked-choice voting system under less pressure.

Louisiana has been using the voting method since the early 1990s as a solution to its compressed election timetable. Arkansas, which also employs run-off votes, adopted the ranked-choice voting system in May 2005.

According to Tim Humphries, legal council for the

Arkansas Department of State, the implementation process of the ranked-choice voting for overseas and military voters was not difficult. The education of election commissions, clerks and voters proved to be the only barrier.

Humphries said the process has served the state well.

"I think it is possible that it could be extended to all overseas voters," said Humphries of the IRV process. Currently five other cities around the nation have followed suit and implemented IRV.

Few users of ranked-choice voting

Nationally, however, IRV and other forms of ranked-choice voting have not caught on, with only a handful of municipalities (San Francisco, Berkeley, Calif., and Burlington, Vt.) using the method for local elections. Some of the arguments against the use of IRV question voters' ability to understand the logistics of ranked-choice voting and the costs associated with its implementation.

Despite these arguments, Rob Richie, executive director of FairVote, remains positive about the direction of IRV. "IRV has passed every test it has faced so far in flying colors," he said. "If military voters from Arkansas and South Carolina handle the system well, it will be more evidence of its value being real, not just theoretical."

Lawmakers in a number of states — including California, Maine, New Mexico and New Jersey — have introduced legislation for instant runoff voting, but none have garnered the necessary support to implement the measure statewide. Currently several localities such as Denver, Minneapolis, Santa Fe, N.M. and Pierce County, Wash. have created task forces to study IRV. Bills are currently pending in Iowa and Massachusetts.

Supporters

According to FairVote, instant-runoff voting's supporters include Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., Democratic party chairman Howard Dean, and Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill. Yet, even with such notable figures backing the alternative voting system, few national initiatives have materialized. Rep. Cynthia McKinney, D-Ga., introduced H.R. 2690 in May 2005, which would require federal elections to employ IRV. The bill, however, has idled in committee.

Source: electionline Weekly - June 15, 2006, electionline.org

State [of Vermont] considers instant runoffs

• Lawmakers weigh pros, cons with eye on Burlington race

By Nancy Remsen, [Burlington, Vt.] Free Press Staff Writer

MONTPELIER [March 16, 2006]

Lawmakers should think carefully about expanding instant runoff voting to the elections for statewide offices such as governor and lieutenant governor, Sen. Hinda Miller, D-Chittenden, advised Wednesday.

Miller told members of the House and Senate Government Operations committees she worried how instant runoff voting would change politics and campaigning in elections. Both committees have bills proposing the use of instant runoff voting in statewide races with more than two candidates.

Miller came in second in Burlington's recent mayoral race, and instant runoff voting determined her political fate. None of the five candidates had sufficient votes to win outright. In an "instant runoff," officials used a special computer program to tally the second choices of voters who had supported the candidates with the lowest vote totals. Progressive Bob Kiss won a majority.

"I have been pleased to be part of this experiment," Miller said. With a glance toward Kiss, a member of the House, she added, "Bob Kiss won this election fair and square under these rules."

Support

Miller supported the introduction of instant runoff voting in Burlington, she said, and agreed with other witnesses that the new process ran smoothly.

"The question you have to consider," she told lawmakers, "is whether this is how we want to elect our candidates." She argued that instant runoff voting changes campaigning, giving candidates sway in influencing the outcome by telling their supporters how to cast their second-choice votes.

Opposition

Sandy Baird of Burlington, lawyer and former Democratic House member, questioned the need for instant runoff voting.

"This was never a call from the grass roots," she said. "This was an electoral strategy to favor third parties." What's wrong with waiting a couple of weeks

Exit poll results

Sixty-one students in a legislative research class at the University of Vermont interviewed 1,098 Burlington voters on March 7 to get their thoughts on the new instant runoff voting system used in the mayoral race. Here are the results:

• **LIKE IT?** 66.4 percent said yes; 16.3 percent said no; 17.3 percent didn't know or care.

• **AWARENESS:** 89.3 percent knew before they came to vote they would be asked to rank their mayoral choices on Election Day.

Political differences

Voters responded differently based on their political affiliation.

• **POSITIVE REACTION:** 68 percent of Democrats, 80.4 percent of Progressives, 39.5 percent of Republicans; 67.8 percent of independents.

• **SUPPORT EXPANSION TO GOVERNOR'S RACE:** 61.8 percent of Democrats, 81.4 percent of Progressives; 27.1 percent of Republicans; 66.1 percent of independents.

• **SUPPORT EXPANSION TO ALL STATE-WIDE RACES:** 54.8 percent of Democrats; 76.5 percent of Progressives; 24.7 percent of Republicans and 61.1 percent of independents.

to have a runoff election, she asked. "Voters deserve that time," she said, "to make an intelligent decision."

Baird also said mayoral candidates watered down their messages to appeal to voters they hoped would support them as second choices.

Support

Kiss disagreed with this assessment. "I think it is unfair to say people couldn't make distinctions."

Kiss admitted instant runoff voting produced a new phenomenon on the campaign trail. "I had people come up to me and say, 'You are my second choice.'"

Jean O'Sullivan of Burlington said instant runoff voting allows elections to be decided when voter turnout is highest. "Voter turnout drops about 50 percent in a runoff."

Caleb Kleppner, a consultant from Election Solutions hired to develop Burlington's instant runoff system, cited evidence of its success. "There is no evidence that IRV led to voters' skipping the mayor's race," he said. "There is no evidence that IRV led to more invalid ballots. There is no evidence this posed any burden for low-income voters."

"The conclusion to reach is this is a system that voters don't have any problem with," Kleppner told lawmakers.

The officials' part

Burlington officials detailed all the steps they took

to ensure a smooth transition to the system — from mass mailings to banners over busy streets to helpers at the polls. House Government Operations Chairwoman Donna Sweaney, D-Windsor, said, "It looks like you did an amazing job educating people."

Rep. Kurt Wright, R-Burlington, noted the city spent several thousand dollars to explain the system to voters. If it were adopted for statewide races, Wright asked, "how much money would we have to spend?"

Legislative review

The Senate will take the lead in reviewing the instant runoff voting legislation, said Senate Government Operations Chairman Jim Condos, D-Chittenden.

Lawmakers will weigh not only the competing opinions of the system's benefits, but an advisory letter of Attorney General William Sorrell suggesting the vote-counting method couldn't be used in elections for governor, lieutenant governor or treasurer without amending the state Constitution. The Constitution says when no candidate for these offices wins a majority, the Legislature picks the winners.

With the time running short in this session, Condos predicted his committee might settle for requesting the secretary of state study how to carry out the change for the 2008 election.

Contact Nancy Remsen at nremsen@bfp.burlingtonfreepress.com

A postcard mailed from the Office of the City Clerk, City of Burlington, to each voter explains the process:

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS

Simply mark the oval in the 1st Choice column next to your first choice for Mayor. Then if you choose, you may fill in ovals for your second choice, third choice, etc. You cannot rank the same candidate more than once.

IF NO CANDIDATE IS THE FIRST CHOICE OF MORE THAN 50% OF THE VOTERS, THERE IS AN INSTANT RUNOFF.

Your ballot counts only for your first choice as long as that candidate is among the top vote-getters and therefore in the runoff. If your first choice does not make it into the instant runoff, your ballot counts for your second choice in that round. If your second choice also is eliminated from the race, your ballot counts for your third choice, and so on.

IT'S YOUR CHOICE. You may rank as few or as many candidates as you wish, but ranking your backup choices preserves your voting power if there is a runoff and your top choice is no longer in the running.

FOR MORE INFO: www.burlingtonvotes.org OR 865-7000

Not registered to vote? Need an absentee ballot? Want to vote early by mail? Call us at 865-7000!

For Mayor	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	4th Choice
John Adams	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thomas Jefferson	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Abraham Lincoln	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
George Washington	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
write-in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>