



An Educational Program for Better Democracy through Better Ballots—Issue 1, August 2007

Dear Reader:

The excitement is rising rapidly across the US. The reason—better ballots are being voted in place at an increasing pace. This includes Minnesota where 67% the voters in the City of Minneapolis voted yes on the Ballot Initiative last fall. Citizens in St. Paul have collected enough signatures to place an initiative for better ballots up for vote this or next year. Citizens in Hopkins, Roseville, Duluth, Mankato and elsewhere are actively pursuing new ballot initiatives. Charter commissions in cities like Lake City and Red Wing are evaluating the move towards improved voting systems.

FairVoteMinnesota has been the center for this activity. It is a non-profit, non-political educational organization that has educated the public for the last ten years about voting systems that represent significant improvements over current methods.

To take advantage of the increased awareness, FairVoteMN has started an initiative specifically focused on six counties in South East Minnesota. This newsletter is the beginning of an educational outreach effort that includes presentations to public and private organizations, a web-site addressing the specific situations experienced in each charter city, newspaper articles, exhibits, etc.

Why SE Minnesota? Well—I am the initiator with the desire to raise people's awareness, and since I live just outside Lake City I decided to focus on communities within my reach. This also off-loads the Twin Cities folks since they will be focusing a lot of energy on assisting Minneapolis for the 2009 elections and on the St. Paul Initiative.

You can also help: Introduce me as a speaker to local public officials, service clubs, schools, and other organizations and/or give me leads.

Together we will help spread the word that there are democratic voting methods that are superior to what is in use today.

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Voting Conference Draws Prestigious Speakers

July 24 saw more than 50 people meeting to learn from community leaders about the better voting method known as Instant Runoff Voting (IRV).

The conference moderator was Jon Pratt, Executive Director of The Minnesota Council for Nonprofits which recently endorsed FairVoteMN efforts.

Other speakers included:

Tim Penny, former congressman and Humphrey Institute Senior Fellow who emphasized that the move to Instant Runoff and Choice Voting represents the latest phase of improvements to our voting system.

Carlos Mariani, State Representative from St. Paul addressed the efforts to place the initiative on the ballot in St. Paul.

Dr. David Schultz, who teaches election law at Hamline University and is a Professor in the Graduate Management Department, established that IRV has a strong legal basis.

Ralph Remington, Minneapolis City Council Member, emphasized that IRV levels the playing field, embraces diversity, assures inclusiveness and can be as liberating as was the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Jeanne Massey, Executive Director of FairVote Minnesota, explained how simple and fair the IRV voting method is.

The news media was well represented and follow-up articles appeared in the Star Tribune, St. Paul Dispatch, and others. The week concluded with an interview program with the four largest political parties' leaders on the Almanac program at Public Television.

Tim Penny's brief talk provided additional interesting perspectives. With IRV, he said, no vote is wasted, majority winners (i.e. winners receiving more

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Presentation and discussion about Better Ballots will be held at the St. James Hotel in Red Wing on September 8 at 10:00 a.m. as part of the Hiawatha Valley Greens meeting. Open to the public.

than 50% of the vote in single member districts) are assured. IRV and Choice Voting are natural continuations of a program of improvements that has been ongoing ever since the Declaration of Independence in 1776—and, he said, IRV speaks to everyone’s needs: (Ed. note: The following are my recollections of the points made by Penny.)

The Aligned Voter: These are the ones closely identifying with a political party or a special interest. They should like IRV because a vote for their cause does not help the ones they do not want to help.

The Attentive Voter: These are voters who are loosely aligned with political parties, more issue oriented. Again, they can vote their conscious without helping the ones they do not want to help.

The Ambivalent Voter: These are the ones that don’t pay much attention to what is going on, they have no party favorite but feel that they must vote. Again, they should like IRV because their vote will not help the ones they are not interested in. Voting their conscious means they are heard.

The Apathetic Voter: These tend to be younger first-time voters. They will respond to the candidates whose messages seems relevant to them and can vote accordingly without fear of hurting their preferences.

The Alienated Voter: These voters do not vote. They feel the system is unfair and do not feel that their votes count (or are counted). They will also like IRV because they will finally have a system where, as Former St. Paul Mayor George Latimer said at the FairVoteMN ten year anniversary celebration last spring: “Everyone votes because they can be confident that every vote is counted and every vote counts.”

More Background Information

I, Dag Knudsen, have been elected as a member of the Board of Directors of FairVoteMN with term expiring on 12/31/2009. I am also a member of the Ranked Choice Voting Issues Group convened by the MN Secretary of State. The Group is assembled to look at the system of voting that Minneapolis voters have chosen to adopt and other Minnesota cities have expressed an interest in. The Group will also look at experiences of other localities, the options for voting methods and voting machines, as well as the details of MN statutes that may need to be adjusted especially for statutory cities.

You can contact me to arrange for informative presentations to your group or talks.

Primary Elections Advantages and Disadvantages

How we elect our representatives in a democratic fashion ought to meet the following criteria:

1. The winning candidate should receive majority support (i.e. more than 50% of the votes).
2. Voting for your favorite candidate should not help the person you don’t want to win (the spoiler problem).

Advantages of primary elections:

1. Simple for the voters—they are familiar with the process.
Comment: The simplicity gives an illusion of fairness to the candidates and the voters.
2. Easy to administer.

Disadvantages of primary elections

1. Reduced voter participation. Typical low primary turnout leaves the available choices in the main election up to very few people.

The candidates going to the main runoff election in November may have been chosen by as few as 5% of the eligible voters.

Special interest groups enjoy this leverage. This favors the “inside” candidates.

2. Viable candidates who enjoy broad support are often sidelined by a small group of narrow interest primary voters.
3. The spoiler effect: Voting for your favorite candidate helps the person you don’t want to win.
4. Added cost of an un-needed election.
There are better choices.

WITH MORE THAN 2 CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR OFFICE	<i>Current Methods</i>	<i>Instant Run-Off</i>
<i>Assures Majority Win?</i>	NO	YES
<i>Solves Spoiler Problem?</i>	NO	YES
<i>Reduces “Wasted” Votes?</i>	NO	YES
<i>Negates Need for Primary?</i>	NO	YES
<i>Has Multi-Party Support?</i>	YES	YES

Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) Wins in Comparison to the Current Methods for Single Member Districts.