

Ground-breaking wins for instant runoff voting

From the Center for Voting and Democracy

History was made on March 5, when more than 56% of San Francisco voters gave a big thumbs up to adopting instant runoff voting for electing their most important offices, including mayor. Across the country, voters in 50 cities and towns in rural Vermont endorsed a proposal to use instant runoff voting (IRV) for electing statewide offices.

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Despite well-financed opposition by defenders of the status quo who spent perhaps as much as \$100,000 or more trying to confuse voters with slick mailings, San Francisco now becomes the first major American city to use IRV to elect its officials. It replaces two-round runoff elections that cost more than a million dollars a year, lead to low voter turnout and negative campaigning and exacerbate campaign financing demands. Depending on the capacity of the City's Department of Elections, IRV will be used either this fall or in November 2003.

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Better voting methods require upgraded voting machines

Compatible technology is prerequisite to reform progress

Now is the time for election reformers to convince state and local governments to get voting machine technology that have the flexibility to process and count alternatives to First-Past-The-Post plurality elections.

Voters or their representatives need confidence that the system can be implemented before they adopt an advanced voting system. In fact, city charter amendment efforts around the country have sometimes won or lost on this point.

Since the 2000 presidential election, considerable attention has been given to upgrading voting machine technology. A federal judge in Los Angeles ruled in February that nine California counties must replace their punch-card voting equipment before the next presidential election. This decision came in a lawsuit brought under the 14th Amendment of the Constitution, alleging unequal protection for voters, with implications for voting jurisdictions across the country. Minnesota, though no longer using punch cards, still has a mish mash of precinct-based and centralized optical scanners as well as manually counted paper ballots. Voters with precinct-based scanners have protection of error-correcting capacity that voters with other systems don't have.

Legislation in Congress would provide funding to states to purchase precinct-based electronic voting machines. A Minnesota law from the 2001 special session created an

account to receive any federal funds which may become available and, in turn, provide matching grants to local governments to purchase machines. (The state also appropriated \$1.9 million to the account. However, due to the state's budget crisis, the status of these funds is in doubt.)

Heightened interest in upgrading voting technology suggests increased demand. However, the prospect of receiving federal funds has caused local governments to delay purchasing decisions. Anecdotal information from voting equipment vendors says that sales are down because purchasing decisions are being put off.

This delay gives reform advocates an opportunity to make sure any machines purchased are compatible with Instant Runoff Voting and other advanced alternative systems. One obstacle to adoption of advanced voting methods (including Instant Runoff Voting and forms of proportional representation) is that the voting machine technology to support those elections has not been distributed to Minnesota communities. Even recently purchased optical scanners may not have

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IRV organizer Steven Hill to speak



A main organizer of the ground-breaking victory for Instant Runoff Voting in San Francisco will speak here in April. Steven Hill, west coast director of the Center for

Voting and Democracy, will discuss the campaign and what the victory means for San Francisco and the movement for better voting systems around the country.

The event takes place on Monday April 22 starting at 7:30 PM at Black Bear Crossings On The Lake, 1360 North Lexington Parkway in Saint Paul. The event is sponsored by FairVote Minnesota and is free and open to the public. The venue is wheel chair accessible.

For further information, contact info@FairVoteMN.org.

Instant Runoff Voting *from page 1*

Center for Voting and Democracy staff members Steven Hill and Caleb Kleppner developed a remarkable grassroots campaign, full of youthful energy that delivered more than 125,000 door-hangers in targeted precincts around the city. Leading civic organizations and elected officials rose to the challenge as well; endorsers included Rep. Kevin Shelley, who won the Democratic Party nomination for Secretary of State this week, and the Sierra Club, San Francisco Labor Council, Common Cause, NOW, Congress of California Seniors, Chinese for Affirmative Action, Latino Democratic Club, Libertarian Party, Democratic Party, Green Party and CalPIRG.

In Vermont, 50 of 53 town meetings supported a League of Women Voters-sponsored proposal to use IRV for electing statewide offices. Vermont IRV backers range from Democratic Governor Howard Dean and

Secretary of State Deborah Markowitz to 2000 Republican gubernatorial nominee Ruth Dwyer, Common Cause and the Grange.

Instant runoff voting (IRV) has the potential to crack open electoral politics to new voices and better choices. Used for major elections in Australia, Ireland and Great Britain, IRV ensures that candidates win with majority support in one efficient election. Voters indicate both their favorite and their runoff choices on the same ballot. If no candidate receives a winning majority of first choices, the weak candidates are eliminated. Just as in a delayed runoff, their supporters choose among the runoff finalists as indicated by the next-choices preferences marked on their ballots. Voters who ranked one of the finalists first continue to have their votes count for their favorite choice.

Follow links to more about the victories at www.FairVoteMN.org ✓

Organizational endorsements continue to accumulate

CFR groups show interest in IRV

Public Campaign and Common Cause, two groups traditionally known for their support of campaign finance reform, have announced their support of Instant Runoff Voting. Public Campaign published model legislation with an introduction that described IRV as a natural complement to CFR. It noted that, with more viable candidates resulting from campaign finance reform, the need for a voting mechanism to assure majority rule would become increasingly necessary.

Common Cause president Scott Harshbarger testified in favor of IRV at the National Commission on Election Reform co-chaired by former presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. He called IRV "an important tool for ensuring that the will of the majority is reflected in electoral outcomes". He went on to say that, while the organization was still study-

ing it, proportional representation may "lead to legislative bodies that more precisely reflect the will of the constituencies they were created to represent."

ACLU supports PR as way to represent diversity

The national board of the American Civil Liberties Union has adopted a policy supporting proportional representation voting methods for their ability to assure and enhance representation of diversity. The policy calls for the removal of statutory barriers and urges the adoption of proportional systems.

The ACLU statement strongly criticized voting methods that deny voters the opportunity to cast a meaningful and effective vote. "When an electoral mechanism compromises the ability of groups to share in the exercise of political power, it violates the spirit of the U.S. Constitution," said the statement,

referring to one of the common effects of First-Past-The-Post elections.

Blue-ribbon group calls for return to cumulative voting in Illinois

A high level, bipartisan task force convened by the University of Illinois' Institute of Government and Public Affairs has called for the reinstatement of cumulative voting to elect the Illinois House of Representatives. Co-chaired by former congressman and federal appeals court judge Abner Mikva and by Jim Edgar, former governor of Illinois, the task force evaluated several voting methods. The task force ultimately decided to support cumulative voting, which the state used from 1870 to 1980. The report is available on the internet at www.igpa.uillinois.edu under "Illinois Assembly on Political Representation and Alternative Electoral Systems." ✓

Study circle: Your chance to learn more

Is it time for you to ‘dig in’ and learn more about proportional representation and other voting systems? Registrations are now being taken for the next study circle on voting systems and their effects on the quality of our democracy.

The study circle will be held on four consecutive Tuesday evenings beginning April 30 and concluding May 21. It will take place at the Lynnhurst Community Center Conference Room C, 1345 W Minnehaha Parkway on the corner of W 50th Street, in Minneapolis.

Interested persons may register by contacting the study circle organizer, Ken Bearman, at (612) 827-5131 or by email at info@FairVoteMN.org. The registration fee is \$20, payable at the first session.

The format is a friendly, structured, read-&-discuss approach to democratic self-education, a method with origins in Scandinavia. Each session will be facilitated by FairVote Minnesota Vice-Chair Carol Rudie. Likely questions to be considered are:

- What are the major problems facing our democracy today?

- What is a voting system and how can it affect the quality of democracy?

- What are the alternative voting systems and how do they compare?

- What are the opportunities to take action and help build better democracy?

Participation is limited to the first 12 people to sign up. Don't delay. Register today! ✓

Voting Machines *from page 3*

the essential components installed unless the community asked for those features.

What makes a voting machine IRV-compatible?

To be used for Instant Runoff Voting, a voting machine must be able to record all the voting information on each ballot—the machine must capture the ballot image, not merely tally the total votes cast for each candidate. Many optical scanners in Minnesota could be retrofitted with the ballot image capturing firmware. But it is especially important that newly purchased equipment have the firmware installed because it may add little or no extra cost if ordered at the time of purchase.

Ballot image capturing capability in optical scanners has another function in the post-Florida era: It creates an audit trail to accompany the paper ballots in the event of a recount. Paper ballots can be altered either intentionally or simply by handling after the ballot is cast. Capturing the ballot image adds security by recording the content of the ballot when it was cast. This makes a case for obtaining ballot image capturing capability regardless of which voting method is used.

What can be done to get IRV-compatible voting machines?

The Minnesota Secretary of State must certify electronic voting machines for their compliance with

Four major ballot types

Vote for one (plurality)

- Candidate A
- Candidate B
- Candidate C
- Candidate D

Vote for up to 'x' (at-large plurality; limited voting)

- Candidate A
- Candidate B
- Candidate C
- Candidate D

Distribute several votes in any combination (cumulative voting)

- Candidate A
- Candidate B
- Candidate C
- Candidate D

Rank the candidates in order of preference (Instant Runoff Voting and other preferential voting methods)

- 1 2 3
- Candidate A
- Candidate B
- Candidate C
- Candidate D

Minnesota law before they are sold to local governments. FairVote Minnesota supports a change in state law requiring all new electronic voting machines to support all four ballot types used in the United States, including ranked ballots and cumulative vote ballots as well as the common "vote-for-one" and "vote-for-up-to-X" ballot types. A growing list of civil rights, voting rights, and election policy organizations supports expanding the flexibility of voting equipment in this way.

Active citizens may have the most influence on the actions of their local governments, the units that decide which voting machines to buy and what features those machines will include. Local governments can adopt a policy that all new electronic voting equipment have ballot image capturing capability to provide an electronic audit trail and to handle all ballot types used in the United States, including ranked ballots and cumulative ballots. These requirements can be stated in local government Requests For Proposals from election equipment vendors.

For assistance on proposing a flexible voting equipment policy for your local government, contact FairVote Minnesota's public policy program at info@FairVoteMN.org. ✓

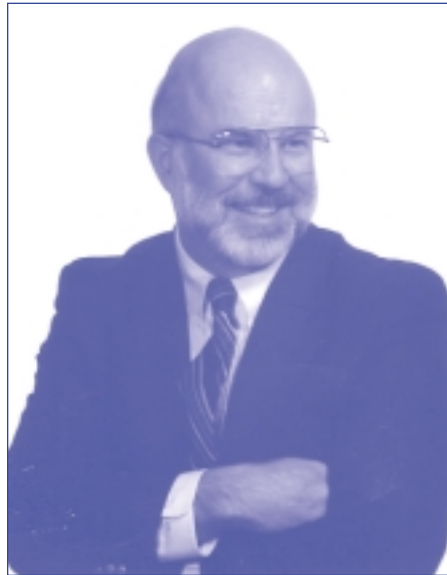
National social justice leader to speak on proportional representation April 13

Dr. James Skillen, president of the Washington DC-based Center for Public Justice (CPJ), will comment on the need for proportional representation elections at an informal open house reception in Minneapolis on Saturday April 13. Friends of FairVote Minnesota are invited to attend.

The Center is a social justice advocacy organization that operates from a distinctive Christian public philosophy it calls "principled pluralism." The Center has been a long-time advocate of proportional representation, and it supported the start-up of the Center for Voting and Democracy in the early 1990s.

Skillen led CPJ as executive director beginning in 1981 and since September 2000 as president. He is the author of several books, most recently *A Covenant to Keep: Meditations on the Biblical Theme of Justice*. He has a Ph.D. in political science from Duke University.

The reception will be hosted by FairVote Minnesota vice chair Carol



Dr. James Skillen

Veldman Rudie at her home, 5408 James Avenue South. The event will begin at 10 AM and end at noon. Those wishing to attend are asked to call in their reservations to (612) 929-9250 during regular business hours. ✓

Speakers travel the state

Why do we need these voting method reforms? How do they work? What are the criticisms? How can we work for the adoption of advanced voting systems? These questions and more were asked and addressed in FairVote

Minnesota's speaking engagements throughout much of the state in 2001.

From Duluth to Winona, FVM provided speakers for local programs. The Speakers Bureau program, with several volunteer speakers and a volunteer program coordinator, is ready to respond to more invitations.

The locations of speaking engagements last year included Duluth, Woodbury, Winona, St. Cloud, Barrett (Grant County), Mankato, Minneapolis, and Saint Louis Park.

Audiences ranged in size from as few as two to as many as 75. Those numbers were extended when two programs were videotaped for cable broadcast or news reports. One program was preceded by a radio interview.

The speakers bureau program coordinator is Patti Hurd. She fields requests and matches up audiences with a speaker. In 2001, those speakers included Tony Anderson Solgård, Patti Hurd, Ken Bearman, and Carol Veldman Rudie.

If you would like a FairVote Minnesota speaker for your program, or if you are interested in volunteering for the Speakers Bureau, contact Patti Hurd at info@FairVoteMN.org. ✓

Thank you!

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Tony & Karen Solgård

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FairVote
MINNESOTA

PO Box 19440
Minneapolis MN 55419-0440

Phone: (612) 724-5540
Email: info@FairVoteMN.org
Web: www.FairVoteMN.org

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