

10-6-09  
Study Session  
IRV



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10/06/2009 12:02 PM

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Dear Councilmembers:

I have done nothing else this week except research Instant Runoff Voting (IRV). There seems to be many problems with this system. Only a handful of jurisdictions across the US that have experimented with Instant Runoff Voting. There seems to be many questions about this type of voting, not the least of which is the confusion that it creates to voters. LB is one of the most diverse cities in California. We cannot discount the Hispanic vote, the Cambodian/Asian vote, and the many other minority votes, including the Pacific Islander vote. I do not think that the majority of the voters of the City of Long Beach would understand IRV - and I am one of them. People have been taught for many, many years and are accustomed to the voting system that is presently in place. To change this system would require:

1. Hiring of more people to explain the new system or much more voter explanation by the people who can explain the new system; and
2. A massive amount of public education, and even then there will be many confused voters, which may result in a decline in voter turnout.

In the 6th district as well as other districts in West, Central and North LB, (not to mention East LB), I fear that this "new" voting system would deter the voter turnout and may result in an even lower turnout in all West, Central and North Long Beach which we know is already too low.

Of the Cities that had recently instituted IRV, Cary NC is no longer an IRV jurisdiction and IRV supporters just don't talk about it any more. The Cary City Council voted recently against continuing with the pilot program that had seen put in place for the 2007 election cycle.

Wikipedia describes IRV as a voting system used for single-winner elections, in which voters

rank candidates in an order of preference. If no candidate is the first preference of a majority of voters, the candidate with the fewest number of first preference rankings is eliminated and that candidate's ballots are redistributed at full value to the remaining candidates according to the next ranking on each ballot. This process is repeated until one candidate obtains a majority of votes among candidates not eliminated. If it sounds complicated it is because IRV adds complexity to the voting process and non-transparency to the counting process. Many voters come into the voting booth with only one strong preference and don't want any of the other candidates to have a chance. IRV forces these voters to vote for their preferred candidate only and eliminate participation in later counting rounds or try to vote strategically for the other candidates in such a way as to ensure their preferred candidate's victory. Not necessarily intuitive or easy since the way the second and third round votes count is dependent on the elimination of some candidates in the first round, which will not be apparent at the time the voter is marking his ballot. **Voting then becomes a guessing game.**

**In a traditional runoff election the voter at least knows which candidates are still in the mix and can cast a ballot accordingly.**

The counting of IRV is also complex and confusing to me in that the elimination of some candidates at the end of the first round means that second choice votes are transferred to other candidates. If a third round is required the elimination and transfer process continues. The average voter has to place great trust in the reliability of the counting algorithm in a way far beyond what is necessary in plurality voting. So the counting is opaque and nontransparent or a kind of voting voodoo with election officials in the role of witch doctor producing the magical results. If one believes strongly that the average voter should be able to understand and observe the counting of votes in a democracy, then IRV fails to meet this standard.

In my research I found an article in Aspen, CO - Some council members said they didn't have enough confidence in, or an understanding of, the IRV process. As a result, it has opened the city up for liability and voter confusion. While listening to the nuances of the complex IRV system and the problems associated with tabulating votes, Councilman Steve Skadron questioned whether he understood the process well enough to make an informed decision on choosing the best tabulation method. And if he didn't understand, did the voters? he asked rhetorically. "This is a level of detail here that I am not connecting," Skadron said.

In my research, I found these statements that appear in letters received from LB constituents, which were included in the back-up of the City's agenda:

1. IRV does not guarantee that the first-choice of a majority of voters will win; The truth is that IRV and plurality voting both guarantee that the first-choice of a majority (50%+1 of voters) will win and that neither the IRV or the plurality method guarantees that a majority favored candidate will be elected when there is not a first-choice majority candidate. IRV tends to eliminate majority favorite centrist candidates and elect candidates favored by voters on the extreme right or the left.
2. IRV will allow a majority candidate to win even if that candidate is the last choice of all voters; A majority candidate cannot be the last choice of all voters. Plurality voting is less costly, treats all voters' ballots equally and provides to voters the right to know that the effect of their

vote on a candidate's chance of winning will be positive."

A lot of people do not realize that in IRV a voter's first rank choice can always hurt the same voter's 2nd rank, choice candidate's chances to win and that a voter's 1st rank choice can also hurt that same voter's 1st choice candidate's chances to win. **There are many simpler, fairer, more economical alternative voting methods available that do not have IRV's flaws if one does not want to use the top-two runoff system. Asian-American population and other minority groups can be disenfranchised. In our current system there is under and over voting. IRV can make this worse.**

Also very important is that IRV eliminates the final runoff between two candidates. During this time issues are defined and positions from candidates are more clear. This period also gives the press and public to scrutinize the candidates. Issues like living in the district etc will be found out.

**WHY WOULD WE WANT THIS FOR LONG BEACH -- IT WILL ONLY COST MORE MONEY INITIALLY, WHICH YOU MAY THINK WILL ONLY BE A ONE-TIME COST, BUT THE EDUCATION STILL MUST CONTINUE.**

**RIGHT NOW I AM REQUESTING THAT YOU PLEASE VOTE "NO" ON INSTANT RUNOFF VOTING. THIS IS NOT WHAT IS BEST FOR THE DIVERSE CITY OF LONG BEACH.**

Annie Greenfeld  
6th District Resident

"Life isn't about how to survive the storm, but how to dance in the rain!"