

I applaud the legislature for looking at alternative voting systems. Our current system is flawed. Unfortunately, the version of ranked choice voting in SB 791 is a poor solution.

I hope we can agree that a voting system is flawed if it elects a Republican in a district which favors Democrats, or elects a Democrat in a district which favors Republicans. I will demonstrate that the voting system in SB 791 is such a flawed voting system.

Imagine a district that typically votes about 60% Democratic. SB 791 is enacted, and many voters in this district begin to vote Green as their first choice with Democrat as their second. Eventually a charismatic candidate runs as a green, and gets more first-place votes than the Democratic candidate. The Democratic candidate is eliminated, but not enough of their votes are reassigned to the Green and the Republican is elected.

Lets put some numbers on this scenario. After the candidates with less support are eliminated, there remains the Republican with 40%, the Democrat with 28%, and the Green with 32%. The Democrat is then eliminated, with their votes getting reassigned to the second-place candidate. 8% of the ballots indicate the Democrat as first-place and the Republican as second-place, 13% of the ballots indicate the Democrat as first-place and the Green as second-place, and 7% of the ballots indicate the Democrat as first-place and do not indicate a second-place preference. The Republican is elected, getting 48% to 45% for the Green.

Of course, a similar scenario could be constructed in which a Republican-leaning district elects a Democrat.

SB 791 enacts a system which is marginally better than our current system, but prevents superior solutions. The legislature should do better.