

James Davis, Communications Officer  
Multnomah County Democrats  
3551 NE Sandy Blvd - Portland, OR 97232



March 16, 2021

*For two hundred years in this county, a horse-drawn wagon was a faster way to get from town to town than walking. It still is. That doesn't mean we would choose it over buying a car today.*

To Chair Wagner and Committee Members,

Thank you for your attention to this incredibly important matter. The issue of voting reform is arguably one of the most important issues you face this session. Both the Multnomah County Democratic Party and the Democratic Party of Oregon have been using STAR Voting for party elections, and so it is with personal experience from using this voting system that I write to you today.

Ten years ago, I would not have believed that I would someday be speaking up against Rank Choice Voting (RCV). I was an RCV proponent for many years, and I want to acknowledge that while it is flawed, it really IS better than our current plurality voting system. Being better than plurality voting is NOT a high bar to reach anymore! It is also true that RCV fails to live up to its promises and has a history of being repealed in many cities that have tried it (see attached list of two dozen cities that repealed RCV from the 1920s to 1950s). Half a dozen cities have repealed it in more recent times, and I am concerned we are starting to go down that road again.

I was saddened by the unsubstantiated claims of RCV proponents, particularly in *using misinformation to generate support for RCV among communities of color*. After careful study, the Democratic Party of Multnomah County included support for STAR Voting in its platform and adopted STAR Voting for its elections. Those elections have gone smoothly *and resulted in very diverse delegations*. In fact, in our county organizing meeting in January, from a field of over 100 candidates, 20 candidates from traditionally marginalized communities constituted less than a quarter of all candidates running yet won 25 of 39 delegate positions (64%). And while that meeting was long, the multiple delays were unrelated to the voting system we used. Similarly, in CD3 party elections last week, a minority of candidates from traditionally marginalized communities won 60% of the delegate and alternate positions. **STAR Voting did not disadvantage minority candidates in either of those elections.** The sad truth is that it is [RCV that has a demonstrated history of disadvantaging communities of color](#)\* through a higher percent of their votes showing up in exhausted (uncounted) votes. *With STAR, every vote counts!*

The platform of the Democratic Party of Oregon sets several criteria for voting systems. Those include:

- 100% accuracy in all election tabulations and support full hand counts (Plank 1)

- the right of political parties to nominate candidates by means of instant-runoff voting... ensuring nominees are supported by a majority of electors (Plank 7)
- highest level of security, accuracy, confidence & transparency throughout the voting process and clarity of instructions in the voters' pamphlet. (Plank 15)
- enactment of voting improvements that eliminate vote splitting and more accurately reflect the preferences and will of the voters. (Plank 29)

The Election Integrity Caucus of the Democratic Party of Oregon conducted an 18 month study and tested several voting systems including RCV and STAR Voting. They looked at how each voting method performed according to the following requirements: 1) Easy to Audit, 2) Decentralized Tabulation, 3) Simple to Administer, 4) Easy to Explain & Understand, 5) Vote your Conscience/Reduce Strategic Voting, 6) Assure a Winner with Majority Support, 7) Eliminate Vote Splitting/Spoiler Effect. Note that decentralized tabulation (precinct summability) is important for audit and chain-of-custody reasons, particularly for statewide races. *RCV would require that all ballots be trucked to Salem to determine statewide winners.* Only STAR Voting met all the requirements of the party. STAR Voting also proved to be an easier voting experience for the trial participants, especially in races that involved more than 5 or 6 candidates! (See attached report.)

I want to applaud Senator Golden's willingness to amend the bill language to include other preference voting systems. **I encourage your committee to amend the bill to replace the explicit endorsement for any particular voting system with language approving use of any voting system that at a minimum accomplishes the following objectives:**

- Easily auditable
- Fully eliminates vote splitting
- Assures winners are preferred by a majority of all voters (not just votes that are counted)
- Is precinct summable (supports decentralized tabulation)

This would allow communities to choose the voting system they want to use so long as it meets these minimum requirements, which will also allow our voting systems to improve over the decades to come. And while RCV as currently proposed doesn't meet this criteria, it could be modernized to do so. This is an incredibly important issue to the hundreds of thousands of voters our local party communicates with regularly here in Multnomah County. Thank you for your attention to these concerns.

With great appreciation for your thoughtful consideration,



James Davis, Communications Officer  
Multnomah County Democratic Party  
503-544-3838

*For over a hundred years, Rank Choice Voting (aka IRV)  
has been a better voting system than Plurality Voting. It still is.  
That doesn't mean we should adopt it today.*

Submitted Documents:

Report: The Failed Experiment of Ranked-Choice Voting by Alaska Policy Forum

Report: A False Majority, The Failed Experiment of Ranked Choice Voting, Maine Heritage Policy Center

Report: Alternative Voting Methods, Election Integrity Caucus of the Democratic Party of Oregon

Article: STAR Voting Helps Create Smooth Party Elections, Multnomah County Democrats

Chart: Partial Repeal History of RCV - 1917 to 1960