

Brian Wanty

Date: June 18, 2023

To: Oregon Senate Committee on Rules

Re: House Bill 2004 A-Engrossed (2023) Ranked choice voting

Chair Lieber, Vice-Chair Knopp, and Members of the Committee:

This bill proposes to change the voting method from plurality to ranked choice voting (RCV) for nine federal and five state executive offices at primary and general elections. The legislation would switch the decision rule from plurality to majority unless ballots are exhausted, and the ballot structure from categorical to ordinal when voters rank more than one candidate. RCV is not a proportional voting method because it retains majoritarian single-seat-district winner-take-all elections.

RCV would eliminate the occasional problem of spoiler candidates. Plurality elections sometimes produce irregular results when more than two candidates compete for a single office. Strong minor party and independent candidates can act as spoilers and swing the election to a major party candidate opposed by most voters.

In general elections since 2002 for the covered offices, candidates won with pluralities in 8 (8.4%) of 95 races. Offices won by less than a majority were: Governor four times, and U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, Secretary of State, and State Treasurer once each. At primary elections during this period, 34 (17.9%) of 190 candidates were nominated by plurality to these offices. Sixteen primary races had no candidate listed on the ballot.

However, RCV increases the complexity and cost of administering elections, and casting a ballot. RCV would require a ballot oval for each candidate and rank, squaring the number ovals. At the 2022 primary election for Governor, 19 Republican and 15 Democrat candidates were listed on the ballot plus a write in blank. Under RCV, this would have required an additional 360 ovals on the Republican ballot and 224 ovals on the Democrat ballot. For all covered offices under RCV, the Democrat ballot would have needed 440 more ovals and the Republican ballot 539 extra ovals, increasing ballot production, postage, and tallying costs. The opacity of ballot tabulation under RCV could also further undermine public trust in election administration. Further, RCV might depress turnout because some voters may find these enormous ballots daunting.

An alternative called the supplementary vote would solve the problem of spoilers more simply by adding only a second choice to ballots. Instead of squaring the number of ovals, the supplementary vote doubles the ovals. It would be less costly and easier to administer and understand. The United Kingdom used it to elect mayors, and police and crime commissioners from 2000 until the Conservative Party repealed it in 2022.

Please amend ranked choice voting to the supplementary vote in this bill.

Regards,

Brian Wanty

Resident, Oregon Senate District 7 and House District 14