

Strong support for HB 2004, Ranked Choice Voting
House Rules Committee
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Testimony from Richard Fobes, "the VoteFair guy"

I strongly support HB 2004 because, unlike earlier similar bills, this bill wisely adopts ranked choice voting for use in general elections, not just primary elections.

I believe that decades from now Oregon's adoption of ranked choice ballots (later followed by using pairwise vote counting) will become recognized as part of a major tipping point for civilization. This is the conclusion I reached three decades ago while living in Corvallis and writing a how-to book on creative problem solving (*The Creative Problem Solver's Toolbox*) that has been published around the world in ten languages. In particular I realized that most of the world's biggest problems are, at their root, caused by our use of very primitive vote-counting methods. That's when I got the VoteFair.org domain name and began telling friends and acquaintances about the need for ranked choice ballots.

Unlike many election-method reformers who talk about "fairness" and "full representation," I prefer to focus on the dramatic increases in economic prosperity that will follow from adopting ranked choice ballots and wise vote-counting methods.

This good feedback loop, in which higher levels of democracy lead to higher levels of economic prosperity, is explained in the last chapter of my other main book, which titled *Ending The Hidden Unfairness In U.S. Elections*. I've summarized this concept in the infographic at: http://www.votefair.org/full_versus_partial_democracy.png

I'm an optimist, and I'm especially optimistic about the future now that Portland has adopted ranked choice voting for Portland's elections.

I'll claim some of the credit for helping to pass that Charter Amendment. I've given presentations about pairwise vote counting in Portland, participated in countless online discussions where I've cleared up misunderstandings about vote-counting methods, and verbally advocated the use of ranked choice ballots to the thousands of people I've met through my former hobby of dancing. Also I was the subject-matter expert for the Ranked Choice Oregon ballot initiative, and although it didn't get enough signatures to reach the next step, I'm sure our work promoting it helped to get the Charter Amendment passed.

Although I'm optimistic that the Oregon state legislature might wisely adopt the well-designed House Bill 2004, I'm also realistic. So some of us are discussing the possibility of starting a ballot initiative if HB 2004 does not get out of committee and get passed.

Some of the testimony here suggests that ranked choice voting is too complex to understand. To refute that claim I'll point out that my free survey and election service at

VoteFair.org has been used for thousands of surveys and elections, including use by elementary school children in Florida to elect their student leaders. The "American Idol VoteFair polls" I hosted at VoteFair.org taught me that it only took one or two ballots before participants realized that marking just their favorite singer was hurting their second and third favorite singers.

Because of my background in getting a degree in Physics I feel the need to mention that it would be easy to improve the wording of HB 2004 so that it avoids the unfair outcomes in Burlington Vermont and the recent special election in Alaska. This refinement would just require adding two sentences to clarify that when a round of elimination involves a "pairwise losing candidate" that candidate should be eliminated even if a different candidate has the fewest "transferred votes." (Just as the candidate with the "most votes" is not necessarily the most popular, the candidate with the "fewest votes" is not necessarily the least popular.) Yet really I'm mentioning this point because it's a valid criticism of the currently available certified ranked-choice-voting software, yet it's not a valid criticism of ranked choice voting.

The other valid criticism of currently certified ranked-choice-voting software is that it does not allow a voter to rank two or more candidates at the same "choice" level. This too is easy to remedy. When two not-yet-eliminated candidates are ranked at the same choice level, that ballot is paired with an equivalent ballot, and one of the two ballots is counted as support for one of the two candidates, and the other ballot is counted as support for the other candidate. (Here's a link to open-source software that demonstrates this counting process: https://github.com/cpsolver/VoteFair-ranking-cpp/blob/master/rcipe_stv.cpp) The huge benefit of this counting refinement is that a voter can fully rank all the candidates even when there are only six choice columns printed on the ballot. That saves paper, saves taxpayers money, and simplifies voting. (Another relevant infographic: http://www.votefair.org/two_marks_same_column.jpg)

These two criticisms of ranked choice voting are worth knowing about because a different vote-counting method named "STAR voting" has been heavily promoted in Oregon (starting in Eugene, where I often went dancing when I lived in Corvallis) as if it were the only way to "overcome" these two valid criticisms of currently certified ranked-choice-voting software.

As you probably know, the fans of STAR voting have started gathering signatures on an Oregon ballot initiative that favors their voting method. That's relevant because they are increasing awareness of ranked choice voting because often they promote STAR voting as a better version of ranked choice voting.

In case any Oregon legislators are tempted to believe the claims of STAR voting fans, it's worth knowing that no government anywhere in the world uses "rating" ballots instead of "ranking" ballots, which is what STAR voting does in its first counting step. That lack of

governmental use is because rating ballots violate the principle of "one person one vote." (To be fair, STAR voting is great for use among friends where strength of opinion is worth considering.)

I agree with the League of Women Voters of Oregon that we as voters would have preferred including Oregon legislative elections in this bill. Yet you are wise to recognize that such a change would open the door to the flawed agenda of the FairVote organization (near Washington DC). They want to impose a version of ranked choice voting that would undermine the Republican party, undermine the Democratic party, and make it difficult for currently elected legislators to get re-elected.

Getting back to the concept of increasing economic prosperity, better election methods will remove the "golden handcuffs" that constrain all elected politicians from enacting long-overdue reforms. In addition to dramatically improving Oregon's prosperity, these reforms also will reduce homelessness, reduce school shootings, reduce drug use, reduce climate change, and reduce many more problems that arise from economic and emotional depression.

I have a dream that Oregon's prosperity can move far beyond just benefiting from the economic prosperity that spills over from California and Washington. Election-method reform is the first step toward making that transformation a reality.

That increased prosperity won't just benefit "Republicans" or just benefit "Democrats." It's a prosperity that will benefit both "Republicans" and "Democrats," both businesses and employees, and both investors and essential workers. (Here's a relevant infographic that shows my perspective of politics: http://www.votefair.org/money_versus_votes.jpg and needed business tax reforms: http://www.votefair.org/tax_takers_more_than_makers.jpg)

Adopting HB 2004 gives you an opportunity to take the first step toward dramatically increasing Oregon's prosperity. (Here's an infographic that shows the steps that will follow: http://www.votefair.org/map_to_full_democracy.jpg)

Please send this wise and valuable bill to the House. And please encourage your fellow representatives to pass it into law.

We, the voters, the consumers, the business owners and employees, and the taxpayers, are anxiously waiting for this reform because it will empower you to begin to pass long-overdue legal reforms. In turn, those reforms will transform Oregon into a showcase for what can be achieved when a state or nation adopts a higher level of democracy.

Richard Fobes

The VoteFair guy