



Stan Lockhart

Former Chairman
Utah Republican Party



Testimony from

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Former Chairman of the Utah Republican Party

In SUPPORT of S.F. 2270

providing for ranked choice voting in elections for federal and state offices;
authorizing jurisdictions to adopt ranked choice voting for local offices;
And more

March 9, 2023

Minnesota Senate Committee on Elections

Dear Chair Carlson, Ranking Member Koran, Committee Members,

I write to you as a former member of the Republican National Committee and a former State Party Chairman with deep interest and a long-time commitment to the success and vitality of our Democracy.

I write in support of S.F. 2270, which would provide for ranked choice voting in elections for federal and state offices; establish a Statewide Ranked Choice Voting Implementation Task Force; authorize jurisdictions to adopt ranked choice voting for local offices; and implement additional rules and protocols to support ranked choice voting throughout Minnesota. This bill provides the opportunity for cities and the state to adopt a simple reform to ensure majority winners, address vote splitting, and save significant taxpayer money.

One of the most powerful aspects of **ranked choice voting** is that it **identifies the candidate with the most support**. RCV addresses the problems of “vote-splitting” and “spoiler” candidates that sometimes result in election winners without broad support. In our current system, a majority of voters may support a particular ideology or party, but split their votes among candidates who support that ideology – resulting in a winner whose views reflect the minority of voters. For example, the presence of Libertarian and third-party candidates has decided recent U.S. Senate elections in Nevada, New Hampshire, and Montana.^{1,2,3} In ranked choice voting elections, voters could rank the Libertarian candidate 1st and then rank a second choice for the next candidate who best represents their values, rather than accidentally helping elect the candidate they want least.

¹United States Senate election in Nevada, 2022. Ballotpedia.

https://ballotpedia.org/United_States_Senate_election_in_Nevada_2022

²United States Senate election in New Hampshire, 2016. Ballotpedia.

https://ballotpedia.org/United_States_Senate_election_in_New_Hampshire_2016

³United States Senate election in Montana, 2012. Ballotpedia.

https://ballotpedia.org/United_States_Senate_elections_in_Montana_2012

Ranked choice voting results in majority winners, and is a faster, cheaper, and better alternative to two-round runoffs. Both are multi-round systems that promote majority support of winning candidates. However, ranked choice voting gets the job done with one election; two-round runoffs require two separate elections, doubling election administration costs and requiring voters to visit the polls twice. In fact, turnout declined between the primary and runoff in 266 of the 276 scheduled federal primary runoff elections from 1994 to 2022, by an average of 40%.⁴

One salient example is the recent Georgia Senate runoffs in 2020 and 2022. Between training and paying poll workers, preparing voting equipment, and more, the 2020 runoff election cost Georgia taxpayers \$75 million,⁵ and cost the two runoff candidates a combined \$79 million for additional campaign advertising.⁶ Yet every single Georgia runoff in the last three decades has had lower turnout than the initial election.⁷

This bill will allow all Minnesota municipalities to consolidate their top-2 runoffs into a single, high-turnout election, thus increasing voter participation in choosing the winner while also saving money in those communities with standalone local primaries. For state and Federal elections, it will deliver majority winners without the fear of vote-splitting and without needing to introduce a top-2 runoff. In addition, ranked ballots will ensure that military and overseas voters are not disenfranchised from participating in runoff elections due to delays in receiving and returning ballots by mail.

Ranked choice voting is a well-tested voting method. Approximately 13 million voters in 63 jurisdictions across the U.S. vote using ranked choice. Since 2020, legislatures in nine states have passed RCV bills, including “local options” legislation that allows municipalities in Utah, Virginia, Maine, and Colorado to use it. In 2021, twenty Utah cities piloted RCV in municipal elections following the passage of local option legislation. The Virginia Republican Party used RCV in 2021 to nominate candidates for statewide offices. Many observers credit the use of RCV for nominating highly electable candidates with great unity behind them. The Virginia GOP also used RCV in 2022 to nominate four congressional candidates. Those campaigns were observed to be far less negative, and those candidates emerged from the primary election with much higher positivity ratings than non-RCV candidates in adjacent districts.

Below is a sample ballot from the two-winner RCV election for Draper City Council in 2021.

DRAPER CITY COUNCIL AT-LARGE (2 Seats) RANKED CHOICE VOTING: Rank up to Seven candidates.							
	1 First choice	2 Second choice	3 Third choice	4 Fourth choice	5 Fifth choice	6 Sixth choice	7 Seventh choice
WILL ASHBY	<input type="radio"/> ¹	<input type="radio"/> ²	<input type="radio"/> ³	<input type="radio"/> ⁴	<input type="radio"/> ⁵	<input type="radio"/> ⁶	<input type="radio"/> ⁷
DANITA ROUZER	<input type="radio"/> ¹	<input type="radio"/> ²	<input type="radio"/> ³	<input type="radio"/> ⁴	<input type="radio"/> ⁵	<input type="radio"/> ⁶	<input type="radio"/> ⁷
RUSS FUGAL	<input type="radio"/> ¹	<input type="radio"/> ²	<input type="radio"/> ³	<input type="radio"/> ⁴	<input type="radio"/> ⁵	<input type="radio"/> ⁶	<input type="radio"/> ⁷
RACHELLE FARLEY	<input type="radio"/> ¹	<input type="radio"/> ²	<input type="radio"/> ³	<input type="radio"/> ⁴	<input type="radio"/> ⁵	<input type="radio"/> ⁶	<input type="radio"/> ⁷
HUBERT HUH	<input type="radio"/> ¹	<input type="radio"/> ²	<input type="radio"/> ³	<input type="radio"/> ⁴	<input type="radio"/> ⁵	<input type="radio"/> ⁶	<input type="radio"/> ⁷
MIKE GREEN	<input type="radio"/> ¹	<input type="radio"/> ²	<input type="radio"/> ³	<input type="radio"/> ⁴	<input type="radio"/> ⁵	<input type="radio"/> ⁶	<input type="radio"/> ⁷
TASHA LOWERY	<input type="radio"/> ¹	<input type="radio"/> ²	<input type="radio"/> ³	<input type="radio"/> ⁴	<input type="radio"/> ⁵	<input type="radio"/> ⁶	<input type="radio"/> ⁷

⁴ Primary Runoff Elections and Decline in Voter Turnout, 1994-2022. Rose, J. (2022) <https://fairvote.org/report/primary-runoffs-report-2022/>

⁵ Georgia runoff elections: Are they worth the cost to taxpayers? ABC News. (2022) <https://newschannel9.com/news/election/georgia-runoff-elections-are-they-worth-the-cost-to-taxpayers>

⁶ Georgia Senate race again draws huge spending: ‘There’s never been anything like it.’ New York Times. (2022) <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/06/us/politics/georgia-runoff-election-cost-funding.html>

⁷ Primary Runoff Elections and Decline in Voter Turnout, 1994-2022. Rose, J. (2022) <https://fairvote.org/report/primary-runoffs-report-2022/>

Voters like and understand ranked choice voting. Exit polling results find that voters in RCV cities overwhelmingly report that they like it and prefer it to their previous voting method.⁸ Exit polling in Utah found that 81% of first-time RCV voters found IRV easy to use and 88% were satisfied with the method they used to cast their ballot.⁹

Understanding of RCV is comparable to plurality voting and better than the “top-two” voting used in some states.¹⁰ Researchers have found no evidence of racial or ethnic differences in understanding of RCV.¹¹ Jurisdictions studying voter reaction on RCV over time find support tends to keep increasing.¹²

Winners in RCV elections always have a majority of the vote when matched head-to-head against their final opponent, **and most RCV winners earn more than majority support.** Most RCV winners are ranked in the top 3 choices by two-thirds of voters or more, demonstrating a measure of broad consensus among voters. Winners of RCV races usually earn the most first choices as well. When the winner is someone other than the leader in first-choice preferences, RCV has prevented an unfair outcome due to the majority splitting the vote.

RCV’s simplicity, representative outcomes, and positive experience for voters have made it an increasingly popular election method. Evidence is strong that **voters like RCV and engage with the ranked ballot.** It is recommended by Robert’s Rules of Order and used in hundreds of private association elections.

Finally, **implementation of ranked choice voting is a smooth process.**¹³ In most cities using RCV, preliminary results are produced on election night or the day after – the same timeline as in single-choice elections. For example, 20 cities in Utah used IRV as part of a pilot program in 2021, 19 of them for the first time. This included large cities like Salt Lake City and smaller towns of only a few hundred voters. After a voter education campaign partially funded by the lieutenant governor’s office, county clerks efficiently administered the RCV elections. Administrators released RCV results on election night alongside results from non-IRV races, including visualizations of the round-by-round results.

With all the benefits of ranked choice voting, I urge you to take advantage of this upgrade for your statewide elections, and to allow municipalities to take advantage of it if they wish. I urge you to support this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Stan Lockhart

Former Chairman of the Utah Republican Party

⁸ FairVote. 2020. Exit Surveys: Voters Evaluate Ranked Choice Voting.

<https://fairvote.app.box.com/s/hlzeu53uw0nrw9yzhbjk4flx2uf9x4fg>

⁹ Survey shows positive response to ranked choice voting. The Daily Herald. (2021).

<https://www.heraldextra.com/news/local/2021/nov/18/survey-shows-ranked-choice-voting-got-positive-response-in-pilot-test/>

¹⁰ 2014 Eagleton Poll California RCV Survey Results. FairVote. (2021). <https://www.fairvote.org/2014-survey-results>.

¹¹ Self-Reported Understanding of Ranked-Choice Voting. Donovan, T., Tolbert, C. and Gracey, K. (2019), Social Science Quarterly, 100: 1768-1776. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12651>.

¹² The 2017 Municipal Election: An Analysis & Recommendations. Minneapolis City Council. (2018).

<https://iims.minneapolismn.gov/Download/RCV2/4684/2017-Municipal-Election-Report.pdf>

¹³ Additional resources on RCV implementation are available from the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center at www.RCVResources.org.