CharterReview - Public Contact

From: <tim.t.lindsey@gmail.com>
To: <CharterReview@cityofsacramento.org>
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Subject: Public Contact

Public Contact

Date	**December 9, 2009**
Contact Name	
Phone Number	
Constituent E-mail	**tim.t.lindsey@gmail.com**
Message	**The things IRV activists don't tell you would fill volumes. Sacramento. Okay, primary elections for city council and for mayor are indeed held in June. So are party primaries. It's not a "special election," and state propositions are considered at the same time. See the results for this election in 2008. http://www.elections.saccounty.net/coswcms/groups/public/@wcm/@pub/@vre/@inter/documents/webcontent/sac_015363.pdf Board of Supervisors elections are by district. Term of office is four years, but it appears that elections are staggered to reduce turnover. In 2008, there were District 3 and District 4 supervisors elected. One result was 55.41%/44.30%/0.49% write-in. There were 6,959 undervotes compared to 21,341 for the winner, and there were 105 overvotes. The other election had only one candidate on the ballot, the result was 97.76%/2.24% write-in, with 11,393 undervotes compared to 24,055 for the winner, and there were 7 overvotes. The mayoral election, however, was heavily contested. There were seven candidates plus write-ins. Large numbers of candidates tends to equal majority failure. Sure enough, Kevin Johnson was the leader, with 32,160 (46.08%). Following not far behind was Heather Fargo, with 27,472 (39.36%). That's a fairly stiff lead, unlikely that with IRV, Heather would overcome it. I don't have data for runoff elections weighted by lead or showing what percentage of elections are "comebacks" based on the lead; it's rather obvious that the closer the position in the primary, the more likely a comeback. If it's close enough, a "comeback" might even happen with IRV. This was a nonpartisan election; the examples of "comebacks" that IRV activists want you to look at are all, as far as I've seen, from partisan elections. In third place was Leonard Padilla, with 4,231 (6.06%). The other three candidates split 5,652 votes (8.49%), and there were 280 (0.40%) write-ins, with 49 overvotes, and 1355 undervotes. What happened in November? I'll look, below, after checking on the City Council elections, since I have the page open. District 2, only one candidate, 2,783 (93.93%), with write-in 180, 6.07%. Undervotes huge: 1,053, with 1 overvote. District 4, only one candidate, 8,991 (97.11%), with write-in 268, 2.89%. Undervotes 3,485, 2 overvotes. District 6, only one candidate, 5,654 (97.31%), with write-in 156, 2.69%. Undervotes 2,267, 1 overvote. District 8, only one candidate, 4,139 (97.5%), with write-in 106, 2.5%. Undervotes 996, 1 overvote. Does the IRV activist mention that these elections with supposedly low "turnout" were of candidates unopposed except for write-ins? The propaganda implies that the low vote turnout in these primary elections is a problem. It sure doesn't look like one to me! IRV would make absolutely no difference in these elections, it would be a complete waste of ballot space. The only improved method that could be used in this situation without costing more than it would be worth is Count All the Votes. If somehow more candidacies developed, it would be simple to bump that up to Bucklin, say, or Range. IRV for the City Council would be a bicycle for fish. In November, there was a runoff for Mayor, of course. For Kevin Johnson, 92,288 (57.40%), for Heather Fargo, 67,348 (41.89%), with 1,154 (0.72%) write-in, 60 overvotes, and 8,638 undervotes. That was a big election, that would bring out many people who didn't give a fig about city elections, but sure knew whom they wanted for President.... Total turnout in the primary for mayor: 69,797 (not counting over and undervotes). Total turnout in the runoff: 160,790. If all the undervotes represented dissatisfied voters, not willing to vote for either of the top two, the result would not flip. IRV activists are apparently not willing to look at real election results. In 2008, the system worked perfectly well. Now, was the primary in June worth the cost? Well, for starters, there really wasn't much *extra* cost. If Heather Fargo spent a lot of money on her campaign, the results don't show it. But I'd guess she didn't. She was really too far behind. Of votes for the top two in June, it was Johnson with 53.94%. Of votes for the top two in November, it was Johnson with 57.8%. Johnson pulled further ahead. Johnson *might* have gained a majority in the primary had it been IRV. Would this have been better than holding a runoff? How? Remember, the IRV activists will argue that low turnout in a runoff (or in a primary, whichever system they are attacking) is Bad. Here, the final decision, the important one, is made by the most voters, by far. As to Fargo, I have some suspicion that her supporters turned out heavily in the primary, more than the supporters of Johnson did, hoping for a chance. Otherwise it is suspicious that Heather gained so few percentage points in the runoff. The "new voters" voted preferentially for Johnson, by higher than the overall relative standings. (Gains in votes: Johnson, 60,128, Fargo, 39,876. Of the sum of these, that's 60%/40%.) Note, Sacramento obviously allows write-ins in the runoff election. That's California law, by default. In a little-noticed decision in 2004, I think it was, the last San Francisco election to be held using top-two runoff, the California Supreme Court upheld San Francisco's action to prohibit write-in votes in the runoff elections there, a prohibition which only affected that one election and which *might* have been designed to prevent a successful write-in candidacy. The candidate was motivated to go up to the State Supreme Count, and voting systems activists have been quite asleep at the switch. The SC decided that, while the California constitution requires write-ins to be allowed in all elections, the runoff wasn't a separate "election," and write-ins therefore were allowed because they were allowed in the primary. This was a head-in-the-sand decision, neglecting standard deliberative process completely, pretty bad. And nobody noticed. So, now, in California, cities can prohibit write-ins in runoff elections, which eliminates the possibility of fixing problems in a primary. As far as I know, however, no other city has done this except for San Francisco. Which certainly accomplished the same damage and more by implementing IRV, which really does blow the chances of underdogs out of the water. In theory, top-two runoff with write-ins allowed in the runoff, would be quite likely to elect the Condorcet winner *if***

	the preference strength for that candidate was reasonably strong, once the results were in from the first round that might have eliminated that candidate. This, however, could cause a spoiler effect in the runoff if it were bad strategy. Easily fixed with Bucklin, best, or Approval would be less satisfactory, but still an improvement.

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