

Comments of Michael Fletcher on SB0383, Ranked Choice Voting in Primaries

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Unfavorable

My name is Michael Fletcher. I have been a resident of Montgomery County for 50 years. During this time, I have noticed the changes made to our election system by our legislators tend to diminish local control of elections in favor of organizations with no accountability to the voters and whose methods are inscrutable to the voters or local boards of elections. Examples are placing the responsibility for maintaining accurate voter rolls with a third-party organization, ERIC, and counting our votes with programmable machines that nobody but the machine vendor can examine. The most recent example is the trend towards using Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) in our elections. RCV involves convoluted ways to count votes that require additional machines and/or software that will, once again, take further control of our voting operations. Election outcomes would be determined by yet another algorithm under the control of outside organizations. If you truly represent the voters of Maryland and support local control of elections, you will oppose RCV. What you should be doing is returning to the voting system we used when I moved to Montgomery County in 1975, i.e., local control of the voting system. That system was believed by the voters to be fair and accurate. Under the current system, an increasing number of voters are not sure if their votes actually count. RCV will only add to the uncertainty.

Before I provide comments on RCV, I have to ask, "What is the problem with our current system?" The recent bills promoting RCV provide no compelling reasons for expending the time and treasure to change the current voting system. The Fiscal and Policy Notes for SB0383 provides the estimated cost to the state of over two million dollars and approximately \$1.7 million cost to local governments for adopting RCV. These expenditures are not justified.

By defining "Election Supporting Technology" as not including a voting system, SB0383 appears to be skirting the requirement in state law that requires a voting system be capable of creating a paper record of all votes cast in order that an audit trail is available in the event of a recount, including a manual recount. The counting methods used in RCV would prevent the SBE from certifying it under State law. Instead of ballots being counted once, RCV ballots are counted repeatedly making it impossible to conduct a post-election audit. And an accurate manual recount audit of ballots would be impossible. Using new election equipment or reprogramming existing election equipment to implement RCV would be implementing a new election system.

The following paragraphs document the many problems with RCV.

RCV forces voters to rank all candidates, even candidates they never heard of or candidates that are anathema to them. Then the results of these selections are determined by another computer algorithm that generates a winner.

RCV is confusing and leads to voter disenfranchisement. During each round of ballot counting, some voters' choices will fall by the wayside, discarded, and those political voices, silenced. Despite spending millions to educate voters on RCV, New York City in its

2021 mayoral race, experienced massive chaos and confusion. So many minority voters' ballots were discarded that the head of the New York State NAACP said, "Ranked choice voting is not beneficial to minorities. It's voter suppression."

The RVC process would allow candidates to win without securing a majority of the votes. The election winner would govern without a mandate from the voters. The will of the voters would, therefore, be thwarted.

RCV divorces candidates from the issues. When multiple names on a ballot must be ranked it, is virtually impossible for a voter to know the platform of each candidate. RCV thus becomes a pick-a-name process. This allows marginal policies to creep into the body politic.

Although Montgomery County voters are accustomed to waiting for election results, using RCV to eliminate runoffs does not guarantee faster results because the multiple rounds of vote tabulation can substantially delay the determination of a winner and increase the cost of the election.

Conclusion

What you, as representatives of the voters in Montgomery County, should be doing (in addition to avoiding needless expenditure of taxpayer funds) is initiating legislation to return to the voting system we used when I moved to Montgomery County in 1975, i.e., local control of the voting system. That system was believed by the voters to be fair and accurate. Under the current system, an increasing number of voters are not sure if their votes are accurately counted. RCV will only make this uncertainty grow. All in all, RCV is an expensive, bad idea, fraught with problems, and should be voted down.