

House Committee on Elections

Feb 27th, 2025

Senate Bill 6

Jay Flatland

Private Citizen

Testimony in Opposition

Chairman Proctor and members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today regarding the proposed ban on ranked choice voting (RCV). I respectfully urge you to oppose SB 6 and leave RCV as a potential option in our future elections.

My support for RCV primarily stems from my concern over the divisive partisan politics gripping our country at this time. Our country is deeply divided along political lines, with our two-party system playing a central role in fostering this polarization. Lawmakers often prioritize loyalty to their party over their duty to voters, as party leadership wields significant influence through threats of primary challenges, control over committee assignments, and even office allocations. This pressure compels lawmakers to toe the party line rather than voting according to their conscience or representing the broader needs of their constituents.

RCV can directly relieve the grasp of party leadership over lawmakers by shifting the focus of electoral success from strict party loyalty to broader voter appeal. In an RCV system, candidates are incentivized to seek second- and third-choice votes from a wider electorate, making them less beholden to their party's extremes and more accountable to the diverse preferences of their constituents. This dilutes the influence of party leadership, eroding the power of primary threats, committee assignment punishments, and other tools used to enforce partisan conformity. By encouraging more moderate, issue-based campaigning, RCV fosters a political environment in which lawmakers are more likely to prioritize the will of the people, rather than rigid party directives, leading to a more truly representative form of governance.

Some examples of RCV producing more moderate lawmakers are Senators Lisa Murkowski from Alaska and Susan Collins from Maine. Both states employ ranked choice voting, and

these two senators are frequently swing votes who break partisan lines to vote with broader central voter appeal rather than party preference.

With regard to ease of use and public opinion, during the primary election in KCMO on August 2nd, 2022 I personally participated in conducting a mock election with Better Ballot KC¹. We asked voters leaving the polls to try the same ballot they just completed using ranked choice voting. Of the 617 ballots collected, 92% said they found the process easy, independent of party affiliation. I personally collected 51 sample ballots from voters, and nobody I spoke with had trouble understanding the process. It was clear and simple to explain, and nobody found it confusing. That primary election selected Eric Schmitt as the Republican primary winner with only 45.6% of the vote.² The RCV results still selected the same candidate, but did so with a majority of 51.1% after 2nd and 3rd choice rankings were considered. The opportunity to utilize 2nd and 3rd choice rankings allowed voters to support their preferred candidate without risk of spoiling their support for a more popular 2nd or 3rd choice candidate.

Some opponents of RCV argue that ballots are “discarded by design”. This is a disingenuous misrepresentation. RCV operates essentially as if runoff elections are conducted immediately by using the voters’ rankings. Saying votes are discarded in RCV is akin to saying voters who do not vote in a runoff election are having their votes discarded.

Some argue that RCV doesn’t represent one vote for one voter. This is also incorrect. Again using the runoff election analogy, voting in multiple rounds of runoffs does not constitute multiple votes. Similarly, the multiple rounds of vote counting in RCV does not constitute multiple votes. In each round each voter’s vote is allocated to a single candidate.

Thank you for considering my testimony, and I respectfully urge you to oppose SB 6.

Sincerely,

Jay Flatland

References

¹Better Ballot KC, "Ranked Choice Voting - Voters Say: It's Easy, and They Prefer It" (August 3, 2022), https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xjSR6qrr_AFuqRhViDCLxpAFVw654LvB/view

²BallotPedia, "United States Senate election in Missouri, 2022", https://ballotpedia.org/United_States_Senate_election_in_Missouri,_2022