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RESTORE ELECTION INTEGRITY

Ranked-choice Voting: Attack on Election Integrity

by Kurt Hyde, *Board of Directors Member*

A growing number of states are enacting or considering ranked-choice voting (RCV), also known as instant runoff voting (IRV). Maine and Alaska approved using this system in 2016 and 2020, respectively, while Nevada voters will vote on a similar ballot initiative in November. RCV advocates also attempted to force a ballot initiative in Missouri, but this effort appears unlikely to succeed this year.

Ranked-choice voting is a complicated system that requires voters to assign a rank to each of the candidates listed on the ballot. The voter chooses his or her first-choice candidate, then the subsequent choices — second, third, etc. When the votes are counted, the first set of vote totals used is the number of first choice votes for all candidates. If one of the candidates gets an absolute majority of the first-place votes, then that candidate automatically wins. If no candidate has a majority, then the candidate with the lowest vote total is eliminated. All the ballots that had the eliminated candidate as the first choice have the second-choice candidate counted instead. This process of vote counting and eliminating the lowest vote getter is repeated until one of the candidates has a majority.

This complicated system can confuse voters and make hand counts much more difficult. As such, it virtually guarantees computerized vote counting at a time when many election-integrity advocates are trying to return to hand-counted paper ballots.

Ranked-choice voting can also lead to electing candidates with little genuine support, as many voters concentrate their attention on the top one or two candidates in a contest and aren't anywhere near as thoughtful about their lower-level selections.

Some advocates for ranked-choice voting point to the amount of time and money required to conduct a runoff election, especially if that state has early voting. But the obvious answer to that is to eliminate early voting and have only Election Day voting in the voters' assigned precincts.

Many voters have been convinced that early voting is necessary due to long lines of voters, and now they are being similarly influenced to believe ranked-choice voting will help solve a similar problem, this one being the length of time required to conduct a runoff election. An article in the October 22, 2018 issue of *The New American* featured an interview with William Gardner, New Hampshire's secretary of state at that time. Gardner explained how his state used efficient processes for voter check-in to have Election Day voting in the nation's two largest precincts without long lines.

In the 2016 presidential election, the town of Londonderry had 12,794 voters who voted in person, and the town of Hudson had 12,457 voters vote in person. When asked why they didn't have long lines at voter check-in, Secretary Gardner explained how efficient the voter check-in

process is at these locations, where they have as many as 15 tables arranged alphabetically for voter check-in.

It is also noteworthy that New Hampshire used paper sheets for the voter check-in.

If a state adopts an absolute-majority requirement for its elections and therefore needs to sometimes have runoff elections, then selecting the top two candidates for a runoff election and giving the voter a reasonable amount of time to consider the merits of the two finalists is the best way for the voters to decide. Also, with any voting system, the more complicated it is, the greater the risk of manipulation or fraud.

To stop ranked-choice voting from spreading to more states, we must spread the word to others about what it is and why it threatens election integrity. We must also urge our state legislators to ensure that ranked-choice voting is not implemented. To easily do both, use JBS's legislative alert "Stop Ranked-choice Voting: Threat to Election Integrity," at <https://gojt.us/pixr>, to call and email your state legislators, and share this alert with others in your community.

Additionally, continue educating others about election integrity. Among other materials, that can be found at <https://gojt.us/l7mt>, the "Restoring Election Integrity" *TNA* reprint and the "9 Ways to Restore America's Elections" slim jim are excellent tools you can use. Please distribute them to others whenever possible.