



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF HAWAII

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Testimony on SB 2560 Relating to Instant Runoff Voting

Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs
Thursday, February 9, 2006
2:45 p.m. Room 225

Testifier: Jean Aoki

Chair Ige, Vice Chair Kim, members of the Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs,

The League of Women Voters of Hawaii has not completed our study on this issue and so do not have a position on it, however, we would like to make some comments on this bill.

The fact is that our present system of plurality elections does not work especially in elections where the winner takes all in one round of voting such as happens when an election is held to replace a councilmember. The race attracts many candidates so that very often the winner wins with less than a majority. This can be seen as a problem because we'd like to believe that at least a majority of the voters have a favorable view of the winner. I believe that was the case in the election to replace Councilmember Mirikitani. Representative Ed Case won the special election to fill the remainder of Patsy Mink's term of office with 51% of the votes cast, but he had just come out of a fantastic run for the Democratic Party gubernatorial nomination and enjoyed name recognition and a very strong following. Going back to 1978, in the special election to elect delegates to the 1978 Constitutional Convention, with each representative district allowed two delegates, some of the candidates, especially in districts with more than a dozen candidates, won with as few as 10% of the votes.

We would propose an amendment to Section 1 of this bill to include special elections held at times other than the regularly scheduled primary and general elections and which are limited to one round of voting to the list of races to be considered for IRV.

In special elections like these, instant runoff voting would probably overcome some of the problems inherent in open-seat special elections. For the voter, it should not be much of a challenge because we are being asked to rank the candidates in order, but need not do so or can limit it to four or five candidates or less. One's ballot will not be spoiled by voting for only one candidate.

The Legislature has enacted a statute allowing for vote-by-mail for special elections. Adding Instant runoff voting as another feature of special elections would probably make the elections fairer and more efficient.

One very strong argument for it is that it would probably discourage negative advertising. Who wants to antagonize the supporters of the other candidates? One needs the support of all voters to consider one for second or third choice if not the first choice.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on this bill.