

From: Chris and Julie Peters cpetersj@me.com
Subject: Fwd: Support Political Reform in Iowa
Date: February 12, 2024 at 09:05
To:



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Support Political Reform in Iowa

According to polling, less than one-third of Americans are remotely satisfied with our politics, a record low. Trust in government, including executive branches, legislative bodies, and the courts, is also at an all-time low. More Americans than ever before have unfavorable views of both the Republican and Democratic parties. Furthermore, more Americans than in years past wish they had more options, including better candidates and additional political parties.

Not surprisingly, Americans are increasingly supportive of a wide variety of political reforms. Term and age limits, along with efforts to reduce the influence of money in politics, are particularly popular. Additionally, more Americans are looking at reforms in how we select our political candidates and eventual elected representatives. They understand that these more fundamental reforms may be necessary before any other objectives can be achieved.

Two reforms focused on candidate selection and election include open primaries and ranked-choice voting (RCV). I am a fan of both of these reforms and, for the past couple of years, have been supporting a new group, Better Ballot Iowa, which seeks to offer RCV as an option to interested counties and municipalities in Iowa.

Currently, RCV is not permitted in any Iowa jurisdiction per legislative statute. Given this, it's interesting that the recently introduced Senate Study Bill 3161 includes Division III, which reiterates that "an election in this state shall not be conducted using ranked choice voting". If something is already not permitted, is it necessary to make it impermissible again?

Perhaps the supporters of this section of Senate Study Bill 3161 subconsciously wished to raise the profile of RCV in Iowa beyond what we supporters could accomplish on our own? Even if not, we'll take advantage of that exposure, so thanks!

Here are some truths regarding RCV to counteract what may be presented by the anti-RCV crowd:

- RCV is not more susceptible to fraud or outside manipulation.
- While there is a small upfront cost for implementing RCV, such as voter education, the long-term costs are unchanged.
- RCV will eliminate costly and poorly attended runoff elections.
- While there can be a short learning curve, RCV is easy to understand for voters, simply involving ranking candidates as they might rank movies watched or books read.
- RCV tends to lead to less negative campaigning, greater voter participation, and improved voter satisfaction.

- While currently elected officials may be wary, there is no evidence that the implementation of RCV benefits one party over another.

RCV is not a panacea for all of our political ills, but it is one reform among many worth considering. Allowing Iowa counties and municipalities to experiment with political reforms, including RCV, may lead to better outcomes. This is the essence of the “laboratories of democracy” ideal, the foundation of our federalism. State overreach, undermining the sovereignty of Iowa counties and municipalities, as exemplified by Division III of Senate Study Bill 3161, should be opposed.

In my opinion, the ones most resistant to change are those who are already in power. We, the people, demand better than the status quo. We wish to make our state and country better for everyone. We are entitled to make changes in our existing political order, to experiment and tinker, always hopeful for a better future. As part of that, we should be free to have conversations about all political reforms, including RCV, with nothing left off the table.

To our state legislators: please remove Division III from Senate Study Bill 3161. To all Iowans reading this, please contact your state legislators to do just this.

[Pew Research, 2023: Americans' Dismal Views of the Nation's Politics](#)

[Gallup, 2024: Record Low in U.S. Satisfied With Way Democracy Is Working](#)





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