Testimony from:

Saul Anuzis

In OPPOSITION to Senate Study Bill 3161

February 12, 2024

Dear Members of the Committee,

I write to you as a former member of the Republican National Committee and former Chairman of the Michigan Republican Party with a deep interest and a long-time commitment to the success and vitality of the Republican Party.

I write in **opposition to Senate Study Bill 3161 (SSB 3161)**, which would prohibit use of ranked choice voting (RCV) in all elections in Iowa. I strongly believe that blanket opposition to RCV hurts Republicans' chances of nominating the strongest possible candidates, both here in Iowa and in other states across the country.

RCV is not a "one size fits all" system, and many state and local Republican parties have used RCV to nominate stronger candidates like Virginia governor Glenn Youngkin. Rather than throw the baby out with the bath water, let's take time to learn why many Republicans in many states like RCV *in some form or in some context.* Supporting some applications of RCV does not mean endorsement of how RCV is used in Alaska, as one example.

First, I know some have real concerns that I take seriously about using RCV in general elections, and our focus is on the nominating process. Virginia provides a particularly good example. I invite you to read this [important analysis by Virginia Republican political consultant Eric Wilson](#) on the value he has seen for Republicans in nominating candidates with RCV in his state.

Contrast Glenn Youngkin's big win in Virginia in 2021, after winning a clear majority of the vote with RCV, with painful losses in a string of U.S. Senate races in 2022 after non-majority, split-vote winners of Republican primaries. Those defeats hurt our party's chances to stop Joe Biden's radical agenda.

Nominees chosen with majority support in their primaries do better in general elections than those chosen by a minority of voters. We can use that fact to our advantage. Our state and local Republican parties deserve the chance to try RCV to strengthen their nominees. SSB 3161 would deprive the Iowa Republican Party of that opportunity, something that other state parties have used to great benefit.

Given the crowded presidential field we saw right here at the Iowa Caucus in 2024, we want a voting rule that will help us pick the strongest consensus candidate among Republican voters and activists – one ready to win in November. Our plurality primaries incentivize us to train our fire on each other and force candidates out of the race before voters have had a chance to weigh in – instead of more Republicans traveling the country and spreading the party's message. That would strengthen the GOP heading into the general election. R Street Institute has published several important op-eds and [reports](#) on the idea of using RCV in the presidential nominating process.

For these reasons, the Republican Party of the U.S. Virgin Islands decided to [use ranked choice voting](#) in its 2024 presidential primary, allowing Republicans there to express their true preference among a crowded field

of candidates. It is too late for other state parties to make similar changes to presidential nominations for 2024. But, by passing SSB 3161, Iowa Republican legislators would close the door on a tool that could help the GOP in 2028.

Second, RCV is not a new idea nor a liberal idea. RCV is supported by numerous organizations, political parties, and state governments led by conservatives. This explains:

- Why six southern states – Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina – have their overseas and military voters cast RCV ballots when holding runoffs to give them a greater chance to have their vote count.
- Why hundreds of private associations use RCV for leadership elections, including the American Chemical Society (the world's largest scientific society), American Psychiatric Association (more than 38,000 members); and American Psychological Association (approximately 150,000 members).
- Why RCV was used in 2020 by the Indiana Republican Party at its state convention to select its nominee for attorney general in a four-candidate race.
- Why Utah Republicans have used RCV at its state convention for major offices, from Governor to Congress, and a 2020 post-convention survey found over 70 percent of participants liked using RCV.
- Why the Republican Party of Virginia in 2020-23 has used RCV to elect its party chair, to nominate five candidates for Congress and a state delegate, and, most impactfully, to nominate its victorious statewide ticket in 2021 led by Glenn Youngkin for governor in a seven-candidate race.
- Why the American Enterprise Institute recently published a report noting that "conservatives have won in places that have enacted… election reforms."

Third, there is no single model of RCV, and forms of it are completely consistent with our goals for election integrity. Many common criticisms of RCV are greatly exaggerated and easily addressed. RCV can be used with a sensible limit of five rankings permitted for voters, for example. RCV instead can be implemented in a simple two-round "instant runoff." RCV can be run such that it is fully "precinct summable" with all data reported locally. Hand tallies can confirm the results, as the Republican Party of Virginia has shown repeatedly.

It is also important to set the record straight on three common criticisms – first, RCV does not cause delays in election results. Most places using RCV release results the night of or day after the election. Second, voters understand RCV. We rank things every day. In exit polls from places as varied as Utah, New York City, Minneapolis, and Alaska, over 80% say ranking candidates is easy. Third, so-called "exhausted ballots" are not the problem they are cracked up to be. Some voters choose not to rank all the candidates, just like some voters do not return for runoffs or vote for one of the top two candidates in a plurality election. By allowing voters to express backup choices on a single ballot, RCV means *more* voters end up having a say compared to runoffs or plurality elections.

The Alaska model is very different from using RCV in primaries. That system is based on ending primaries as we know them and allowing more than one Republican to advance to the general election, where RCV is used to allow voters to consider four candidates. That is not what we are discussing.

I respectfully suggest that there be a clear distinction taken into consideration of the difference between Alaska's use of RCV versus in local nonpartisan elections, party primaries, and/or the nominating process. This isn't some slippery slope proposal that is going to fool Republicans into using something that will harm their general election chances.

Testimony, Saul Anuzis and Stan Lockhart

State parties and their respective party activists are more than capable of picking a nominating system that best fits their specific circumstances. SSB 3161 would rob Iowa Republicans of a tool that would make their own party stronger at the same time.

I ask that you **oppose SSB 3161**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Saul Anuzis
Former Chairman of the Michigan Republican Party