

MOTION RULES & GOVERNMENT

On February 26, 2008 the City Clerk reported to Council with a list of options for improving the administration and voter turnout for City elections. This report came on the heels of the 2007 municipal elections, which saw historic low turnouts of 10.26% for the primary and 6.7% in the runoff. This disappointing result came as a result of a perfect storm of factors.

The decision by the California State Legislature to split the 2008 primary into a State and Federal election has not helped matters, as voters will likely suffer from a "voter fatigue" from being asked to vote in three elections in less than a year. Our own elections in March and May of 2009 (fourth and fifth election in 15 months) will likely continue the downward trend of participation.

One of the solutions suggested in the Clerk's report that has the potential to greatly increase voter participation is the implementation of an Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) election system. This idea has been successfully attempted in San Francisco, where turnout has increased noticeably across all demographic groups. The software cost for the San Francisco system was around \$650,000.

In addition to increasing participation by reducing the number of elections, IRV could potentially save millions of dollars each election cycle for the City, Los Angeles Unified School District and the Community College District. This is significant in this time of budget shortfalls. There would need to be substantial outreach initially, but this cost would steadily diminish over time.

Some concerns have been raised about IRV and the way that the elimination of a runoff would change the strategy for running for office and the types of candidates who would be most likely to prevail. This discussion is important but should not prevent us from moving forward with giving the Council the option of utilizing an IRV system in any election that it deems appropriate.

The City Clerk has recommended that the City experiment with IRV on a limited basis in an upcoming special election for a vacant City Council or Community College District Board seat before trying it out citywide. This could serve as an excellent opportunity to try out this new election procedure without making a permanent commitment that could not be easily undone.

In order to do this, a City Charter amendment will be required. The City should ask the voters for the flexibility to try out this new approach to see if it has the ability to increase voter participation while at the same time saving the City and other government agencies significant amounts of money in a tough fiscal environment. The potential benefits to this switch are tremendous.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the City Council request the City Attorney, with input from the City Clerk, to prepare the documents necessary to place on the March 2009 Municipal Election ballot an amendment to the Los Angeles City Charter to allow for the use of an Instant Runoff Voting system for any City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles Unified School District or Community College District election that the Council deems appropriate.

I FURTHER MOVE that the CLA and CAO be requested to report on the feasibility of dedicating any City of Los Angeles savings for implementing an IRV system toward a special Fund to support the implementation of a program to provide full public financing of all City election campaigns.

PRESENTED BY: 
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SECONDED BY: 
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 Councilmember, 11th District

SEP 23 2008

09-1100-S1

REFER TO CF 07-1100-S12