

MOTION

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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.

The May runoff election cost Los Angeles taxpayers \$5 million -- a cost of \$40 per voter. Each local election costs \$8 to \$9 million to administer runoff elections for the City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles Unified School District, and Los Angeles Community College District combined.

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 "voter fatigue" from being asked to vote in three elections in less than a year. Our own elections in March and May of 2009 will likely continue the downward trend of participation.

One of the solutions suggested in the February 2008 City Clerk 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 implemented in San Francisco, where voter turnout has increased across all demographic groups by eliminating an unnecessary runoff election. The software cost to modify the existing San Francisco voting equipment to run IRV elections was approximately \$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. The millions of dollars currently spent to administer a separate runoff election would be available for other budget priorities. This potential savings is significant in this current time of budget shortfalls. There would need to be substantial education and outreach conducted for using IRV, but those costs would steadily diminish over time. Other jurisdictions using IRV have effectively educated their voters by spending anywhere from \$.50 to \$1.70 per voter in the initial election.

IRV has been discussed at the Council level and in the media now for a number of years. It has considerable merit, and has attracted widespread support among leaders and organizations in Los Angeles. It has met the threshold of a serious idea that has potential to do good things for our City, and it is time for the City Council to put it on the ballot and let the voters decide. In order to do this, a City Charter amendment will be required.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the City Council request the City Attorney, with input from the City Clerk, to prepare and present documents necessary to place on the March 2009 Municipal Election ballot an amendment to the Los Angeles City Charter to implement an Instant Runoff Voting system for elections in the City of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Unified School District, including the use of IRV to fill vacancies and that IRV would be implemented only when certified election equipment and software are available.

PRESENTED BY: *Bill Rosendahl*
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Councilmember, 11th District

Jose Huizar
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See REFER TO COUNCIL FILE 09-1100-S1