

COMMENTARY & DAILY OPINION

Daily News
Endorsement

VOTE
2010 

Do away with IRV

On this fall's ballot, Aspenites are being asked whether they want to go back to a previous system of voting in municipal elections, or keep Instant Runoff Voting (IRV).

We've studied this issue more than most, well before it was implemented for the 2009 municipal election of the mayor and two council members. It has been the topic of much controversy, debate and community divisiveness over the past two years, and it has definitely not been worth it.

It seemed like a good idea at the time — so much so that Aspen voters in 2007 changed the home rule charter, abolishing the old system in which candidates who didn't receive a majority vote entered into a runoff in June, a month after the initial election.

IRV replaced that method, which has voters ranking candidates in order of preference. If all the first-place votes don't add up to a majority for council or mayoral seats, votes are recounted using the second-place votes of those who voted first for losing candidates. That process repeats itself using lower rankings if there is still no majority.

That method involved extremely complicated computer programs, which thoroughly confused people not only in the counting of the votes but also how they ranked candidates the ballot. The electronic counting had voters' heads spinning while they watched the results come in on election night, not knowing for sure how it was being done.

Democracy shouldn't be based on a bunch of algorithms from someone's computer. It's too complicated for the average voter to understand.

While a bit more expensive, the old runoff method is much more transparent and best reflects democracy. If no council candidate gets 45 percent of the vote, and 50 percent plus one for mayor, the top two vote getters face off in a June election.

An extra month of campaigning allows voters to drill down on candidates' positions to better understand where they stand on particular issues. It also more fully reveals their characters.

IRV was a worthy experiment but it doesn't work here, especially when there are several candidates on the ballot, as was the case in 2009.

A driving factor for voters to approve IRV was that it was supposed to save the city government money because it didn't have to hold a second election. But we argue that it has cost the city far more — both in time and money — as a result of a few people with too much time on their hands challenging the method, how the election was conducted, and the aptitude of the city clerk and attorney in implementing it.

It's become a mess, resulting in a lawsuit against the city, and tons of wasted of time and energy that should be spent on more important matters.

Vote YES on Referendum 2B, which repeals IRV and changes the home rule charter to re-instate the previous June run-off procedure. Let's get back to basics and traditional democracy.

Outrage

Editor:

Martin Beeson's recent statements that the Public Defender's Office "abuses" the Sixth Amendment by defending indigent people accused of crimes demonstrates why, now more than ever, the Public Defender's Office must heed its mission to ensure that indigent people accused of crimes in this valley are provided the highest and most zealous level of representation money can't buy.

In *Gideon v. Wainwright*, the United States Supreme Court recognized that in our country, "from the very beginning, our state and federal constitutions and laws have laid great emphasis on procedural and substantive safeguards designed to assure fair trials before impartial tribunals in which every defendant stands equal before the law. That noble ideal cannot be realized if the poor man accused of a crime has to face his accusers without a lawyer to assist him."

Most people, especially lawyers, understand the Sixth Amendment's guarantee that everyone has a right to legal representation when the government accuses them of a crime, whether they are rich or poor. We all enjoy and expect that if we, a family member, or friend are charged with a crime we are presumed innocent. However, Martin Beeson calls people accused of crimes "criminals," even though a jury is supposed to make that determination, not a county bureaucrat.

The lawyers, investigators and support staff who work in my office do so tirelessly and without adequate compensation or recognition. They have not had raises in years and are not likely to get one any time soon. They have taken furlough days. Yet, because we believe so strongly in the fundamental rights that make this country great, we will stand between the government and its enormous resources and poor people accused of crimes.

Each member of my staff could take jobs in the private sector making much more money. But each of those people stands shoulder to shoulder with me to ensure that the government's power is reined in and checked at every turn.

I am heartened by the many phone calls, e-mails, and voices from this community which have expressed outrage at Martin Beeson's comments. Your recognition of fundamental rights in the face of governmental ignorance makes me more proud than ever to be a Colorado State Public Defender and to work in this community.

**Tina Fang
Carbondale**

SOS — again.

Editor:

There cannot be a more important asset to our community than the young people who are part of our Aspen Public Schools. Recognizing this, Aspen area voters have provided our kids with wonderful learning opportunities in great schools with effective teachers and terrific programs of all kinds. Our kids take advantage of school programs from International Baccalaureate to athletics and music, to outdoor education and demanding academics. Our high school graduates go on to college and further education — nearly 100%. This community has a history of providing the support that our schools and our kids need. We need to vote that support again this fall.

Because of reductions in state funding, our school resources were reduced by \$1.2 million this past year. Next year, the shortfall will be another \$1.6 million. Knowing that about 85% of school budgets are for payroll — teachers and support staff — there are just not many options in reducing budgets to address this \$1.6 million loss. Teaching and staff reductions could total 21 people, and all kinds of valued programs will be in danger. Our schools and our kids are too important to allow these cuts to happen.

Our plea is to the Aspen and Snowmass communi-

ties to again support our schools by approving referendum 3A, adding back in \$1.35 million to avoid the serious cuts that will hurt our educational programs and our kids. The cost to local tax payers is low. These valued assets — our young people — are depending on us to keep their schools as they are: effective places of learning and growing. "SOS" — Support our Schools on Nov. 2, and vote yes for kids.

**Warren Klug
Aspen**

High school endorses 3A

Editor:

The teachers and staff of Aspen High School endorse the passage of Referendum 3A on November 2.

Referendum 3A is vital to preserving the quality education that has made the Aspen School District one of the best in the state. This past school year, the Aspen School District faced a budget shortfall of approximately \$1.2 million dollars. These budget shortfalls will continue even without the passing of 3A. With the impending prospect of additional cuts to our funding, the Aspen School District will be forced to reduce programs, cut teaching positions, and subsequently, increase class sizes.

Ballot measures 60, 61, and 101, if passed, will result in reduced revenues and additional cuts that will further hinder our ability to deliver quality instruction.

A "Yes" vote on Referendum 3A will go far in helping us maintain the current level of quality in the Aspen School District by helping us maintain our current funding level and bridge the gap of additional cuts that must be made this fiscal year due to a reduction of state revenue.

The cost to you, the taxpayers, is an increase in the mill levy that amounts to \$16 per \$500,000 in assessed property value.

It is because of our deep commitment to the students of Pitkin County and the community that supports them that we ask for your help in passing this important referendum.

We know how much you value our instruction, our educational programs, and the quality of your teachers, and we are proud of what we have accomplished together to make the Aspen Schools the best place for kids to learn.

Vote YES on Referendum 3A on November 2 to keep our Aspen Schools great.

Aspen High School faculty & staff

Impact on the school district

Editor:

As the head boys basketball coach at Aspen High School and a health & physical education instructor for the Aspen School District over the past 12 years, I am very concerned about the possible outcome of some ballot measures for the Aspen School District and the negative impact these measures will have on the community's quality schools.

Can you imagine no sports at AHS or AMS anymore? Hard to fathom.

Can you imagine no "IB" program at AHS?

Can you imagine no "ex ed" programs at AHS or AMS? Difficult to swallow.

Can you imagine no "college counseling services" or "college fairs" at AHS?

Can you imagine no electives like "art, P.E., music, theater"? Ridiculous.

Can you imagine (27) Teachers losing their jobs and many of our special services disappearing in the Aspen School District? Unthinkable.

These are possible programs and/or services that could be affected if another budget shortfall is realized

LETTERS ON FOLLOWING PAGE

Opinions expressed are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect those of the Aspen Daily News staff. Letters to the editor from valley residents concerning local issues are encouraged. Letters must be 400 words or fewer and will be published on a space-available basis; it is our intention to publish all letters we receive, except those that are libelous or unsigned. Preference will be given to e-mailed letters.

All letters must include the author's name and telephone number for purposes of verification, and may be e-mailed to letters@aspendailynews.com, delivered to our office or faxed to 920-2118.

Inquiries about guest editorials, which must be fewer than 750 words, should be e-mailed to sack@aspendailynews.com and lutz@aspendailynews.com. Letters and guest opinions are subject to editing for space and content.