

City voters repeal IRV

By Curtis Wackerle Nov 3, 2010

A large majority of Aspen voters have rejected instant runoff voting for city elections, opting instead to go back to the June runoff system.

Unofficial results from the Pitkin County Clerk and Recorder's office show Referendum 2B passing with 65 percent of the vote — 1,654 in favor and 880 against. The question repeals IRV, which was used for the first time in the May 2009 City Council and mayoral election, with a system that forces a June runoff if no mayoral candidate gets 50 percent, plus one vote, or if no two council candidates get 45 percent, plus one vote.

IRV is a system that lets voters rank candidates in order of preference. If the first-place choices don't result in enough votes to win, voters' lower ranking choices come into play to pick a winner.

Aspen voters — by a 70 percent margin — decided to amend the city charter in 2007 to make way for IRV. However, after seeing the system in action, those same voters have changed their minds.

Perhaps one problem with the 2009 application of IRV was the City Council race in which it was used had a field of nine candidates, five of whom polled strongly on Election Day. Had the June runoff system been in place, four candidates would have participated.

Aspen voters got rid of the runoff system partly because in the four municipal elections in which it was used, the candidate who received the most votes in the first round won the runoff every time, making the extra month of campaigning seem like a money-sucking, brain damage-inducing waste of time.

Prior to 2001, Aspen used a plurality system to elect its leaders, meaning that whomever received the most votes won, regardless of how much or how little support they actually had. That system was done away with after candidates were winning office by drawing less than 40 percent of the vote.

After the 2009 IRV contest, Marilyn Marks, who polled second in mayoral balloting, launched a new campaign, requesting that the city release digital ballot images cast by voters, in order to conduct an audit of official election results. The city denied that request, claiming that doing so would violate state law. That prompted a lawsuit from Marks. A district court judge sided with the city in March, and the suit is pending on appeal.

curtis@aspendedailynews.com

Curtis Wackerle

Editor