

....disenfranchised soldiers and overseas voters

The short length of time between some primary and general elections, and between elections in many traditional runoff systems, presents a significant obstacle to absentee voting for men and women in uniform when stationed overseas. Instant runoff ballots are becoming increasingly popular as an innovative way for jurisdictions to ensure that all overseas absentee voters have their votes count in every round of voting.

"The Way Democracy Will Be"  
[www.fairvote.org](http://www.fairvote.org)

VOTE



FairVote  
6930 Carroll Avenue  
Suite 610  
Takoma Park, MD 20912

# INSTANT RUNOFF ABSENTEE BALLOTS



....protecting overseas voters



"The Way Democracy Will Be"

# SOLUTION

Election officials recommend mailing ballots to overseas voters at least six weeks before an election, but some jurisdictions leave only one week between election rounds. Far too often there is not nearly enough time to certify first round results, print runoff or general election ballots, send them to troops stationed in war zones and receive the returned ballots in time to count.

Mailing delays, recounts and other obstacles too often disenfranchise our service men and women. Several states have solved this problem by providing overseas voters with instant runoff ballots that ensure their votes count in both the first round and second round of voting.



**“[Using instant runoff absentee ballots] protects overseas citizens’ right to vote in a runoff when the absentee ballot turnaround time is often tight.”**

Charlie Daniels, Arkansas Secretary of State,  
news release on April 5, 2007

## THE INSTANT RUNOFF BALLOT SOLUTION

Instant runoff ballots solve the problem of a short turnaround time between elections. Overseas voters receive two ballots – a standard ballot for the first election and a ranked choice ballot for the second election. The ranked ballot contains all the candidates from the first election, and voters rank them in order of preference, from first to last.

Both ballots are returned before the first election, and the standard ballot is counted as usual. In the event of a runoff election or a general election, the ranked ballot is counted toward the highest ranked candidate who advanced to the second round.

## THE INSTANT RUNOFF BALLOT ADVANTAGE

- Military personnel stationed overseas can be confident their ballots will be counted without lengthening the election season for voters back home.
- These ballots comply with federal standards set by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) and have received pre-clearance from the Department of Justice.
- Election administrators eliminate unnecessary and often ineffective overseas mailing costs.

## RANKED BALLOTS IN ACTION

Louisiana pioneered the use of ranked ballots for overseas voters, extending it to all out-of-state military voters in their frequent runoff elections. In 2006, South Carolina adopted instant runoff ballots for military and all other overseas voters in all federal and state primary runoff elections and had a successful first election that year. Arkansas has used instant runoff ballots for all overseas military voters in all federal, state and local runoffs since 2005, and extended it to all overseas voters in 2007.

Voters like the proposal. In April 2007, Springfield (IL) adopted instant runoff ballots for overseas voters in their local elections through a ballot measure. The measure earned an astonishing 91% of the vote.

## INCLUDEEVERYVOTER.ORG

American men and women in uniform protect our democracy at home and help others support democracy overseas. These duties should not interfere with their ability to participate in democracy at home. IncludeEveryVoter.org is a FairVote project dedicated to protecting the voting rights of military and overseas voters at the federal, state and local levels through the use of ranked ballots.

**For more information, contact:**

**INCLUDE EVERY VOTER  
FairVote**

6930 Carroll Ave., Suite 610  
Takoma Park, MD 20912

**Phone: (301) 270-4616  
Fax: (301) 270-4133  
E-mail: [irv@fairvote.org](mailto:irv@fairvote.org)**

Based in Takoma Park, MD, FairVote is a leading national non-partisan, non-profit pro-democracy organization. We pursue an innovative, solution-oriented agenda that focuses on systemic change and increasing political participation.