



Sample Legislative Testimony

Hello, my name is _____ and I am a local member of FairVote, the Center for Voting and Democracy, a national non-partisan, non-profit organization. I am a resident of _____.

_____ is a bill on instant runoff voting and is more timely than ever, with _____ facing several multi-candidate congressional races in the coming year.

As the 2000 presidential election and local elections frequently demonstrate, our electoral system is deeply flawed. The idea of "majority rule", a government for the people and by the people seems like a farce when a minority of voters elect our leaders.

Plurality voting, whereby the candidate with the greatest number of votes wins, is the problematic norm in what is known as the "American Experiment".

In any races with three or more candidates, a winner can be elected with less than 50% of the vote. Two like-minded candidates can split their base of support, which can lead to the election of a candidate who is the polar opposite of the majority of voters.

This is not a partisan issue; plurality voting affects Democrats, Republicans and third parties. Another example from 2000: Washington State Republican incumbent Slade Gorton lost because he and the Libertarian Party candidate split the majority vote.

The spoiler effect is a pervasive stain on our democracy that knows no party boundaries, no geographic lines. The fear of vote splitting affects more than the outcome of elections, it affects the way each of you has to carry out a campaign from start to finish. I bet there is not one of you who like the pressure of having to engage in negative campaigning to defeat those who hold similar views to you, but threaten to cut into your base support. We all know that negative campaigning drives down voter turnout and draws attention away from serious policy concerns in a campaign.

So, what is the solution? Well, if you ask Senators John McCain or Barack Obama, the answer is instant runoff voting, a methodology of voting whereby voters rank their choices in order of preference, and in case no candidate garners 50% or more votes; ballots are recounted, with their second choice then counting as their first choice. This continues until a clear majority winner emerges.

Members of the committee, the clock is ticking on our democracy. Despite recent rises, current voter turnout pales in comparison to turnout of the 1950's and in comparison with other democracies. As the country continues to be more divided, the likelihood of close elections increases exponentially. How will _____ handle these contentious situations? Not very well if _____ (legislation #) is not passed.

In closing, if a possible alternative to simple passage of _____ is needed, I suggest a motion be made before voting that a study of IRV be conducted.

Several states are currently considering IRV and it is used in cities in California, Maryland and Vermont with less voter error reported than in past plurality elections and overwhelming voter support in exit polls.

The national media stands poised to put the spotlight on _____, and to commend the judgment of each of you for taking leadership on this issue.