

Time for instant-runoff voting

THE ISSUE: Many voting systems put in place in another era create needless confusion, complexity and expense on Election Day

OUR POSITION: It's time to embrace instant-runoff voting, which saves money and encourages candidates with broad constituencies

Americans are a practical people. And we are proud to call ourselves the world's oldest democracy. So why haven't we figured out how to make voting easy?

Of course we don't see the kind of outright fraud and intimidation common in many nations. But Nov. 6 treated us to many scenes reminiscent of voting in the Third World: lines around the block at voting stations in Arizona and Florida, for example.

Critics in many states accuse state or county officials of gumming up the works on purpose to achieve a partisan goal. In other cases, pure incompetence is to blame.

Another enemy of sensible voting is simple tradition. Systems put in place in another era now add needless confusion, complexity and expense to what should be a straightforward business of counting votes.

One obvious example of this is the Electoral College. Another is the system of running elections largely on the local level, with a mishmash of procedures and varying levels of competence.

The good news is that California does better than most states. We have a tradition of professional, nonpartisan election officials at the state and county levels.

The bad news is that we continue to follow many outdated and inefficient practices. We can do better.

Now is the time for all California

EDITORIAL

counties to embrace so-called instant-runoff voting. Also known as ranked-choice voting, this system is gaining popularity around the country, most notably in San Francisco and Alameda counties.

Under this system, voters rank candidates in order of preference. If no candidate wins a majority of first-choice votes, the last-place candidate is eliminated and those votes redistributed according to second-choice preferences. The process continues until one candidate has a majority.

The advantages are impressive:

- Governments could save millions of dollars — and increase overall voter turnout — by eliminating runoff elections.
- Candidates would have no need to raise more cash for a runoff race, limiting the influence of campaign

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contributions.

- Winners are determined in hours — or, at worst, days — rather than months.

- The system rewards candidates with broad appeal, rather than extremists backed by a narrow but rabid band of supporters.

This last advantage may be the most profound. One widely-cited example was the election in 2010 of Jean Quan as mayor in Oakland even though she did not place first in the initial round of balloting.

Quan won because she had broader support than Don Perata, who finished first but lacked a majority; once the votes of losing candidates were distributed, Quan emerged as the consensus favorite.

That's something we need at every level of government: leaders who know how to serve the broadest possible constituencies.

No process is perfect, of course. The results of ranked-choice voting can still be manipulated by a determined group of voters. And the method requires voters to learn a new way of casting their ballots. But experience in San Francisco, Oakland and Berkeley over the last two years — including smooth balloting on Nov. 6 — shows that voters catch on quickly.

California counties should do the same. Let's move to an election system that saves money and rewards better leaders.

before they even ask for them. This guy is to labor what Petain was to France."

— Phil Thomas

On Hostess getting approval for liquidation and letting go 15,000 employees:

"I didn't think the union on strike was entitled to unemployment benefits so they could be out in the cold. Hostess likely will be bought by another capital venture group and in search of profit, will be sliced up even more with probably only a fraction of the bakeries back in operation. If the union thinks they can demand equal wages and benefits compared to what they were offered, they may be kidding themselves."

— Doug McPherson

"Chalk up another victory for the unions — another business they've destroyed."

— Steve Folino

YOUR COMMENTS WELCOME

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Making art choices for businesses

Kira Stewart, founder of **Art Consulting Services**, says she's "crazy in love" with what she does for a living. She says she also loves the artists she represents, the clients she works with (most often architects and designers) and "the end users, the people who'll live every business day with the art choices we make for their work environments."

At a lively coffee chat at **Bella Bru** in the **Pavilions** shopping center this week, Stewart, 49, and her newest consultant, Cathy Kleckner, 30,

tell me about the joys and challenges of their industry, which Stewart describes as "simply bringing art to business."

While she started out as an oil painter, whose more popular works were bright, expressionist landscapes, she also spent



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a number of years in the corporate world, working for **Volt** and **Jenny Craig**, and in the nonprofit sector, writing grants for Sierra College's economic development department.

But she credits the time she spent working with local gallery owner **Elliott Fouts** with teaching her how to select and price the art she procures or commissions for her clients.

"I started out doing this at Elliott's place, then went on my own about six-and-a-half years ago," she says. She was a one-person shop for her first year; today she employs four full-time and two part-time.

When I ask how badly the recession affected her business, she grins widely, her pale eyes seem to fill with mirth and she says, deadpan, "Well, it was horrible. We did a total of five jobs in 2009 and spent all the money we'd made in 2008," she says. No layoffs? "Oh, no," she says, almost shivering at the prospect. "I learned in the corporate world that you're only as good as your people."

Stewart consults with designers, architects and end users, such as the lawyers, doctors and others whose offices she fills with art. More often than not, she says, she works with ad hoc committees at those workplaces.

I ask her what that's like and she smiles: "Daunting," she says. "But in a good way. You always risk watering down the original vision but because you rarely have just one decision-maker on a project, it works out well, because the final selection is a true collaboration."

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FEEDBACK

Comments posted at sacramento-businessjournal.com about last week's Business Pulse Survey, which asked: How will your business adapt to state tax increases?

"Between the taxes and over-regulation I am to a point where I might just close the business. No one seems to understand that small businesses take the brunt of taxes and regulations and if you close the owners have no unemployment or relief or do they become a statistic because no one seems to be counting what the economy has done to small business or tried to do anything to give relief."

— Carol Bentley

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"The increase in the sales tax is just the tip of the iceberg. You can expect that there will be many more tax increases to follow now that the unions have total control of California. It will become harder and harder for business to survive."

— Steve Folino

On the DMV headquarters remodel taking 14 years to finish:

"I fail to see how they can compute it twice as expensive to move into a new facility unless they claim that managing a 14-year-long construction progress and 14 years of disruption to your workforce has no cost. This sounds more like one of the crazy homeowner renovations."

— Richard Markuson

"This is a great example of why California is in such fiscal dire straits. Be serious — it cost a lot more than \$130 million if it took 14 years!"

— Stuart H. Alden

"I have to wonder if the technology you put in at the start of the project was out-of-date by the time they finished!"

— Steve Holmes

On the CEO of the California Hospital Association calling for unions and organizations to work together to survive:

"The vast majority of unions work well with their employers. You never hear about them though. I'm glad to see the Business Journal write this article. Funny thing is that if you ask union members if they are happy with their union; 90 percent say they would never work for a nonunion company. Yet public perceptions are always so skewed."

— Darrin Simmons

"Ninety percent of the union members would have a hell of a time trying to get the same wages and benefits at a non-union company, but the odds are greater that the latter group will still have their jobs five years from now."

— Ron Edde

"(Service Employees International Union-United Healthcare Workers West local president) Dave Regan's style is to offer employers concessions

FROM
THE
WEB