

I.R.V. AMENDMENT

We propose to vote to add a plank to the 2005 Massachusetts Democratic Party Platform, supporting Instant Runoff Voting (IRV). In the platform section concerning Voting Procedures, we propose to add:

(5) “To promote greater voter participation, to encourage positive, issues-focused campaigns, and to give successful candidates a real mandate, we support the adoption of Instant Runoff Voting for elections to all state offices.”

(6) “Instant Runoff Voting ensures that in a race with three or more candidates the winner is the candidate who has the support of the majority of the voters. This conforms with the bedrock democratic principles of majority rule and one-person-one-vote. We also encourage towns and cities to adopt fairer voting systems, such as Instant Runoff Voting, to further empower the voters.”

I.R.V. INFORMATION

Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) allows voters to list their preferences of the candidates -- in effect, voting for more than one candidate in a given election. The "instant runoff" part means that, if your first preference loses, your vote goes to your second preference. The proposed platform amendment would call for implementing IRV in Massachusetts elections for the six statewide offices. Some benefits of Instant Runoff Voting:

- Candidates focus more on issues, since they can ask for your #2 vote based on an issue that is important to you.
- Elections focus on coalition-building rather than negative campaigning, since other candidates' supporters can still vote for you.
- Voters have more reason to get out and vote, since their those disaffected by limited choices can vote for their first choice and then also a choice among major candidates.
- The winning candidate is the one preferred by most voters, with no spoilers or split votes.

Q: Why should Democrats support IRV?

A: If we had an IRV system in the 2000 presidential election, Gore would be president, because most Nader voters would have chosen Gore as their #2 choice.

Q: Would we need new voting machines? Or new ballots?

A: Voters mark their ballots with choice #1, choice #2, and choice #3, in a regular voting machine. Most existing voting machines can handle IRV ballots. For the voter, it's as easy as 1-2-3!

Q: Isn't this a new and untested system?

A: Ireland and Australia have used IRV systems for decades. Numerous localities -- including some in Massachusetts -- have used IRV systems for years also. It's not new and it's well-tested, both in court and at the voting booth.

Q: Is this relevant to current public policy?

A: There are three bills in the Massachusetts legislature about IRV: H2784, H2785, H2952. These bills will be debated and voted on this year, so the Democratic Party should take a stand on IRV in this platform.

Q: What does the Democratic National Committee say about IRV?

A: Howard Dean supported IRV in his debate against Ralph Nader. Dean debated Nader to persuade people to vote for Kerry instead of voting for Nader -- he says that debate would be unnecessary with IRV:

We wouldn't be having this debate today if we had a system of instant runoff voting in this country. Then Ralph Nader would pose no threat to the election of John Kerry. If we had instant runoff voting, we could have the kind of debates that Ralph wants, open debates, because third parties wouldn't cause those problems. -- Howard Dean, July 2004