

THE CENTER FOR VOTING AND DEMOCRACY

April 15, 2004

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Dear UC-Davis student representatives,

I am executive director of the Center for Voting and Democracy, the nation's leading source of information on alternative voting methods. Since becoming the director in 1992, I have testified to numerous charter commissions and state legislative panels, been a frequent guest on national television and public radio and had articles published in seven books and most of the nation's leading newspapers.

As the nation's leading resource on voting methods, we have followed UC-Davis' use of choice voting (also called "the single transferable vote") with great interest. Choice voting has a notable history, beginning with its early passionate advocacy from John Stuart Mill through its adoption for national elections in the Republic of Ireland (for parliament) and Australia (for senate) and a fascinating history in the United States. It was part of the National Municipal League's model charter for decades, and was adopted for city council elections in such cities as Cincinnati, New York and Cleveland. After World War 2 it fell victim to a combination of opposition from party machines, intolerance of racial minorities and slow, cumbersome hand-counts. It does have a strong 63-year history in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a diverse city of some 100,000 people.

Overseas, choice voting has recently gotten a big boost in New Zealand (where it will be used by all voters in this year's local elections), in Scotland (where a bill is close to passage that will institute it for all city council elections) and Wales (where a commission just endorsed it for all city elections). We see a likely resurgence in the United States as well.

I understand you are debating the system there and the possibility of going to a point system instead. I would consider this a mistake. Point systems create perverse incentives for voters, often leaning to truncated ballots. There is a good reason that there is a long and developing history of choice voting being used, but no such history for public elections of point systems being used.

If we can be a resource to you, please let me know.

Best regards,



Rob Richie
Executive Director

Executive Director
Robert Richie

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Web Site
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