

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 29, 2018

8:04 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Justin Parish, Co-Chair  
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky, Co-Chair  
Representative Harriet Drummond  
Representative John Lincoln  
Representative George Rauscher  
Representative Dan Saddler  
Representative David Talerico

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative DeLena Johnson (alternate)  
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins (alternate)

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 390

"An Act establishing a ranked-choice primary election system for nomination to state executive and state and national legislative offices; establishing a ranked-choice general election system for election to state and national legislative offices; repealing the special runoff election for the office of United States senator or United States representative; and requiring certain written notices to appear in election pamphlets and polling places."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 390

SHORT TITLE: RANKED-CHOICE PRIMARY ELECTIONS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) PARISH

02/21/18	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/21/18	(H)	CRA, STA, FIN
03/22/18	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/22/18	(H)	<Bill Hearing Canceled>
03/27/18	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/27/18	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
03/29/18	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

## WITNESS REGISTER

PATRICK COURTNAGE, Staff  
Representative Justin Parish  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented HB 390 on behalf of Representative Parish, prime sponsor.

KAREN BRINSON BELL, Election Administration Consultant  
Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center  
Charleston, South Carolina

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 390.

JEREMY SPEIGHT, Assistant Professor  
Department of Political Science  
University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF)  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during hearing on HB 390.

CHARLES BILES, Professor Emeritus  
Mathematics  
Humboldt State University  
Arcata, California

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided input during the hearing on HB 390.

DAVID NEES, Education Researcher  
Alaska Policy Forum  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 390.

MARILYN RUSSELL  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 390 in support of RCV.

## ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:04:26 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR TIFFANY ZULKOSKY** called the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:04 a.m. Representatives Saddler, Lincoln, Talerico, Parish, and Zulkosky were present at the call to order. Representatives Rauscher and Drummond arrived as the meeting was in progress.

## HB 390-RANKED-CHOICE PRIMARY ELECTIONS

8:05:02 AM

CO-CHAIR ZULKOSKY announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 390, "An Act establishing a ranked-choice primary election system for nomination to state executive and state and national legislative offices; establishing a ranked-choice general election system for election to state and national legislative offices; repealing the special runoff election for the office of United States senator or United States representative; and requiring certain written notices to appear in election pamphlets and polling places."

8:05:39 AM

CO-CHAIR PARISH, as prime sponsor, introduced HB 390. He proffered that when a group of 10 friends gets together for dinner and votes on what to have, and spaghetti got the most votes, with three people in favor of it, that would probably not end the decision making. However, in voting, the majority wins, even if that majority is only 30 percent of voters. He opined that the system is inefficient, leads to a sense of disenfranchisement, and has other negative consequences he said would be highlighted by upcoming testifiers. He predicted that under HB 390 there would be increased voter turnout, decreased campaigning, and a greater sense of voter enfranchisement.

8:07:29 AM

PATRICK COURTNAGE, Staff, Representative Justin Parish, Alaska State Legislature, Presented HB 390 on behalf of Representative Parish, prime sponsor. He began a PowerPoint presentation [hardcopy included in the committee packet]. As shown on slide 2, Mr. Courtnage reviewed that in plurality elections, when there are more than two candidates, a winner can be declared with less than a majority of the vote.

MR. COURTNAGE turned to slides 3-6, which show that ranked choice voting is as easy as 1-2-3. The first step is for voters to rank as many candidates as they want in order of choice; the second step is for all choices to be counted, and if a candidate has a majority, then that candidate wins; the third step happens if there is no one with a majority of the votes, in which case the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated from the ballots. If the person eliminated was someone's first choice,

then that voter's second choice would be counted, and so on. The majority in ranked choice voting is 50 percent plus one.

[8:11:38 AM](#)

MR. COURTNAGE turned to slide 7, which shows the states where ranked choice voting (RCV) is being used today, most importantly, he said, in Maine, which will be using RCV in its upcoming state primary election. The map on the slide also shows that RCV is used in municipalities, such as Portland, Maine, Minneapolis, Minnesota, San Francisco and Oakland, California, and most recently Santa Fe, New Mexico. Mr. Courtnage noted that in the committee packet was a survey of Santa Fe's mayoral election. He said RCV is also used in various states for party elections.

MR. COURTNAGE turned to slides 8 and 9, which show the following benefits of RCV: no more vote splitting or "spoiler" candidates; no more "wasted" votes; increase in voter turnout; voters do not have to guess who might make the runoff but can vote their conscience; easy use on modern voting equipment or "with workarounds" on older equipment; candidates doing best when reaching out positively instead of attacking opponents; candidates earning back-up support to win, not just first choices; less negative campaigning.

[8:15:04 AM](#)

MR. COURTNAGE gave a summary of the presentation, as shown on slide 10, and he indicated that RCV could result in an increase in the percentage of candidates of minority groups and "a more representative and fair election."

[8:16:10 AM](#)

MR. COURTNAGE brought attention to a proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 390, labeled 30-LS1102\J, Bullard, 4/2/18, and he noted that Version J would change the word "majority" to "plurality" in Section 3, on page 2, line 24, to clarify the general gubernatorial election must be won through a plurality. He explained this is in accordance with Article III, Section 3, of the Constitution of the State of Alaska, which states that "the candidate receiving the greatest number of votes shall be governor."

[8:18:56 AM](#)

KAREN BRINSON BELL, Election Administration Consultant, Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center, imparted that she has worked in election administration since 2006, having served with the North Carolina State Board of Elections as a district elections technician and as the former election director for Transylvania County, North Carolina. Ms. Brinson Bell paraphrased her written testimony [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Dear Co-Chair Zulkosky and Members of the House Community and Regional Affairs Committee:

On behalf of the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center, thank you for the opportunity to comment on House Bill 390.

Having worked together overseeing statewide, municipal, and district ranked choice voting (RCV) elections, the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center Consulting Team is focused on expanding the resources and information available regarding the administration of and education about this voting method. We have developed a repository of best practices and first-hand experiences through our website [www.rankedchoicevoting.org](http://www.rankedchoicevoting.org) and our Model Implementation Plan. We provide webinars, podcasts, and presentations at no cost to assist election administrators, policy makers, candidates, and the public to identify whether RCV is an option for a jurisdiction and to assist with implementation plans including processes for tabulating results, voter education, and more.

We work closely with usability experts, equipment vendors, local clerks, audit specialists, and others. The more we learn, the clearer it becomes that RCV elections have and will work efficiently and effectively in our nation's elections, including the elections for Alaska as outlined in House Bill 390. RCV has emerged as a solution for promoting majority support, broader representation through voter choice, inclusive leadership, and civility. Our role is not advocacy focused; rather, we aim to provide resources that allow jurisdictions to overcome the perception that implementing and conducting RCV is too difficult.

Ranked choice voting has been a part of the U.S. elections process for more than 100 years. Invented in Europe in the 1850s as a proportional representation system, it was adapted to single-winner or instant runoff form in the 1870s by MIT professor William Ware. Shortly thereafter, Australia adopted the system and continues to use RCV today, along with countries such as Scotland, Ireland, and Malta. In 1915, Ashtabula, Ohio, became the first U.S. city to implement RCV, and by the 1940s, RCV was in two dozen cities across six states. However, by 1962, 23 of these 24 cities had repealed RCV for reasons largely related to party bosses realizing it was difficult to control council members once elected and newly introduced lever voting machines could not be used. Yet Cambridge, Massachusetts, has continued to use RCV for more than 70 years for city council and school board elections, and 10 additional U.S. cities currently use RCV as well. There are also five states and the city of Springfield, Illinois, that use RCV for military and overseas voting. And in June the voting method will be used statewide in Maine, while future use has been approved for Benton County, OR, and in seven other cities across the country.

Having administered ranked choice voting elections in North Carolina, I can also share first-hand experience. When the state legislature established opportunities for municipalities to pilot RCV, I helped the city of Hendersonville in 2007 and 2009 with this voting method. Analysis by North Carolina State University of exit survey results after the first RCV election concluded RCV worked as intended, and more than 85% of those voters found RCV easy to understand. In 2010, I also helped administer both statewide and district level judicial vacancy elections with RCV. This successful implementation occurred in a 3-month window, utilized existing voting equipment, was part of a ballot that included non-RCV contests, and worked within the confines of the existing election budget. Only \$200 in actual funds was spent on marketing or voter education - we worked closely with the media, issued public service announcements, and added supplemental information to the statewide judicial voter guide. Last but not least, our most effective voter education tool proved to be written and verbal instruction to the voters

when they presented themselves at the polling place and in absentee-by-mail materials.

In my current capacity, the consulting team and I have analyzed the RCV-capability of existing voting equipment and are currently in the testing phase for a Universal RCV Tabulator, which is available as free, open source software to any jurisdiction or voting system vendor. While Alaska's current voting system, AccuVote TSX and AccuVote OS, does not have built-in RCV capability, data can be exported for tabulation using the Universal RCV Tabulator. If Alaska moves forward with a new voting system, including all mail balloting, the latest voting systems from the four largest vendors in the United States are all RCV capable. However, none of these vendors have a product capable of optical character recognition as proposed in HB 390, so we would encourage an amendment to the bill to allow for methods currently within the voting systems, such as column or grid ballot designs. We can provide further assessment after more in-depth discussion about your election processes and any decisions regarding ranked choice voting, all mail balloting, and change in voting systems.

Upon passage of this legislation, the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center team and I stand ready to provide assistance and resources for voter education, implementation practices, and tabulation procedures at no charge to Alaska's Division of Elections.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 390.

[8:26:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked Ms. Brinson Bell what would happen if a voter ranked only "one candidate each time."

MS. BRINSON BELL answered that if a voter preferred only one candidate, then he/she would mark the ballot accordingly. She said marking additional preferences is encouraged and often voters seem to have those additional preferences. She explained, "Because that allows us to continue with the ballot counting process." She stated, "If you think of it in terms of if it were a run-off situation, there are often voters that would make their first selection when they go in on the primary

day, or the election day, but then they might not participate in a run-off, because they don't prefer either of the candidates that made it into the run-off round. So, they wouldn't lose their option to only vote for one ... candidate, but certainly this allows for it."

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER offered his understanding that "if you only choose one candidate on your first, second, and third choice, there's ... a chance that you won't be involved in the second or third go-around if there was one needed."

MS. BRINSON BELL confirmed that is correct. She further confirmed that the additional rounds take place only when no candidate receives the majority in the initial round.

[8:28:35 AM](#)

MS. BRINSON BELL, in response to Representative Saddler, imparted that the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center comprises four individuals who work remotely as a nonpartisan consulting team. She offered further details.

[8:32:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND asked if it is true that Maine has publicly financed elections.

MS. BRINSON BELL said she does not know but could find out.

[8:33:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LINCOLN offered his understanding that Maine had voted against [ranked choice voting] for its next election.

MS. BRINSON BELL responded that a constitutional amendment had been put forth by referendum of the people of Maine for an opinion from the Maine Supreme Court. The opinion was that there were certain offices that could not be elected by ranked choice voting. She explained that is why Maine is going forward with ranked choice voting for its primary election but will not be doing so for the General Election. She noted that the Legislature of Maine passed a bill that would change the process, but there was a people's veto; that veto will be on the ballot in June. In response to a follow-up question, she said ranked choice voting has not been used statewide in Maine; it has only been used in the City of Portland, which she estimated is the largest city in Maine. As a point of reference, she

related that when North Carolina did its statewide judicial contest as part of its General Election ballot, it had approximately 4.3 million voters. North Carolina had conducted two pilot elections in 2007 in Kerry and Hendersonville, with populations of approximately 100,000 and 13,000, respectively. In 2009, she said, the City of Henderson had enough candidates to file to use RCV again as part of a pilot. She explained, "So, that was the only familiarity that was in the state of North Carolina prior to having a statewide ranked choice voting election."

REPRESENTATIVE LINCOLN asked Ms. Brinson Bell if she thinks there is any benefit for a state contemplating statewide RCV to first try it in municipal elections.

MS. BRINSON BELL predicted that Alaska would not have trouble with the RCV system, because it is an intuitive process; however, a municipal option could be one approach to exercise caution. She said the State of Hawai'i has considered doing congressional vacancy elections [with the RCV system]. She noted that Santa Fe, New Mexico, gave itself a two-month period in which to create its rules and move forward. She said RCV can be done in a timely manner; it is effective; and voters understand it.

[8:39:09 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ZULKOSKY asked Ms. Brinson Bell how RCV would work in communities with populations as small as 500, in which many of the population spoke English as a second language.

MS. BRINSON BELL answered that within North Carolina, where RCV has been used, there are counties with fewer than 3,000 voters. Regarding language, she said Santa Fe, New Mexico, provided its RCV ballot in English and Spanish. She named Minneapolis and San Francisco as two other cities in which multiple languages are spoken. She relayed that Alameda County puts out video and pamphlets in multiple languages to explain the RCV process.

[8:41:03 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR PARISH asked for confirmation that in one case, only \$200 was spent on voter education.

MS. BRINSON BELL answered that is correct. She referred back to the judicial vacancy she spoke of in her opening remarks. She said North Carolina did not know it would have RCV until that

vacancy occurred in August; therefore, the state did not have the budget set aside for it. She indicated that [the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center] worked with the North Carolina Broadcasting Association to broadcast RCV information in public broadcasting service format. She imparted that \$200 was spent on a page in the state's existing judicial guide, which is sent to every household in the state. Other methods of putting out the message included public presentations, inserts in county water bills, and presentations to groups such as the Rotary Club. She remarked, "In the end, the very best thing that we had was just clear instructions in a small handout that was given to each voter when they came to vote or with their absentee by mail materials." In response to a follow-up question, she said there was no exit-poll conducted, but there was a positive response. She said the election resulted in a run-off and a recount, and there was full transparency so that the public was aware of the process.

[8:44:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked whether [the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center] reached out to Alaska or vice versa.

MS. BRINSON BELL said Fair Vote made the introduction, and she held conversations with [Mr. Courtnage].

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked the bill sponsor the same question.

CO-CHAIR PARISH explained the genesis of the bill was when he called Legislative Legal and Research Services and said he wanted an RCV bill. He deferred to his staff for further clarification.

[8:46:15 AM](#)

MR. COURTNAGE said the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center did not initiate contact with Representative Parish; the bill sponsor was convinced "through general resources" that RCV was "a good way to go," and he requested a bill be drafted. Fair Vote is an advocacy group for RCV and sent general e-mail to Representative Parish once the bill was submitted. Fair Vote offered to answer questions at that time, sent information regarding what had been done [in other states] regarding RCV, and put the bill sponsor in touch with the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center and Ms. Brinson Bell.

[8:47:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked if it is the goal or an additional benefit of RCV to increase diversity.

MS. BRINSON BELL said that is outside her area of expertise; however, she surmised it is more likely an added benefit.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked for clarification regarding the term "wasted vote."

MS. BRINSON BELL answered, "That term could also be 'an exhausted ballot,' and that's one that ... - by the fact that they only ranked one candidate, no candidate, or they ranked a candidate ... that ... [was] eliminated and didn't continue in the rounds of voting - ... that ballot can no longer be utilized."

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER opined that a vote for candidate that does not win is not a "wasted vote." He asked if, under RCV, it is possible that a candidate could win who was not the first choice of a majority of voters.

MS. BRINSON BELL said she agreed that no vote is a wasted one, because any ballot submitted is voting, which is the goal of the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center. To Representative Saddler's question, she explained as follows:

If you think about a situation where you've got a large number of candidates - say, five candidates - that are running ... either in a primary or in a General Election, in whatever capacity, if ... the votes are tallied and no candidate has received more than, say, 25, 30, 35 percent of the vote, then that's not a majority of voters expressing - that's just a portion of the voters. And so, by going through the rounds of counting and taking ... the last-place finisher and the votes that are cast for that last-place finisher, and looking at those voters' second choice and ... counting those second choices ... to the remaining candidates, now you begin to understand what the consensus is and that the majority of the voters are [emphasis on "are"] behind a certain candidate. And that's ... the entire intent, and that's why ... I reference inclusive leadership and broader support. When it's all said and done, the votes now have been tallied, and now we know that one

person had a majority of the support of all the voters.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER expressed concern that RCV seems to change the dynamic of the voting process.

[8:52:49 AM](#)

JEREMY SPEIGHT, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), stated that he is Canadian and was contacted by Mr. Courtnage to comment on RCV in Alaska. He said he sees debate about electoral system change as part of a broader debate about what is important in society. He said although there are a number of problems with the plurality systems in much of Western Democracy, those systems generally are supported for a number of reasons. He said plurality systems tend to produce majorities in legislatures, which is a big reason why advocates support them. He explained that a majority in a legislature might increase accountability between those elected, winning parties, and citizens. He said in plurality systems, in contrast to coalition governments, citizens are more aware about who is responsible for making policy decisions. Further, he noted that there is an argument that majorities result in more effective government.

MR. SPEIGHT said RCV is a modified form of proportional representation systems, in which a broader segment of society - minority groups - are represented in legislatures, and this feature is an important value to those supporting RCV. Conversely, he stated that there may be problems with accountability and effectiveness, "where you have coalitions in government, the ability to make choices becomes impeded by the fact that smaller parties and parliaments can function as veto players, ... can block policy change." Mr. Speight said debates about electoral change or broader institutional change are couched in debates about what values are important in society, typically accountability and effectiveness versus representation.

MR. SPEIGHT advised that RCV: ensures majorities at the constituency level; empowers third-parties and third-party supporters; reduces wasted votes, which encourages citizens to vote their consciences instead of supporting a party they might otherwise not vote for; incentivizes moderate political discourse, wherein party candidates have to be concerned about supporters of other parties that may vote for them in subsequent rounds of RCV.

MR. SPEIGHT suggested the committee may want to consider that although there may not be a lot of academic research on the outcomes of RCV and effects could be mixed depending on the context, the contextual factors in Alaska that might have an impact on this type of change are: the relationship between the legislature and executive branch; divisions in society; and lobbying or special interest rules.

[9:00:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked about Mr. Speight's comment that there is not a whole lot of academic research on RCV.

MR. SPEIGHT confirmed there is some, and a lot of it is mixed. In response to a follow-up question, he said although he had not been specific in his testimony, he indicated that RCV can encourage voter turnout.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER remarked on the low voter turnout for the primary and General Election in Alaska in 2014. He remarked that if [only] 39 percent of the population is willing to vote, then "you don't really have a majority anyway." He said most of the people he talks to express that their votes are not really going to matter, because of Alaska's time zone. He said he is not sure a second or third layer in voting is going to bring more people to the polling place, and he asked if there has been a study done that shows that [RCV] has increased voter turnout.

MR. SPEIGHT responded that although he does not have empirical evidence, one argument is that in a Presidential election where voters may be disenfranchised from the two main parties in the election, RCV may be an incentive for them to vote for a third-party candidate.

[9:05:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER observed that RCV seems to be a step toward broadening the choice beyond two parties. He asked if it would be possible to open the ballot to access all candidates to all voters and, thus, have all the benefits of RCV.

MR. SPEIGHT answered that he does not think so. He surmised that under Representative Saddler's scenario, it would still be a winner-take-all plurality system, which still disincentivizes people to vote for any candidate they want, because he

questioned why someone would write in a fringe candidate if he/she thought that candidate had no chance of winning.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said it seems like RCV would advantage fringe candidates.

MR. SPEIGHT advised that there should be debate about "whether this is a positive or negative thing."

[9:08:38 AM](#)

CHARLES BILES, Professor Emeritus, Mathematics, Humboldt State University, paraphrased from his written testimony, which read as follows [original punctuation provided, with some formatting changes]:

Please permit me to extend a special thank you to co-chairs Justin Parish and Tiffany Zulkosky, and the entire House Committee on Community and Regional Affairs for the State of Alaska, for this invitation to give input regarding HB 390, the Ranked-Choice Voting bill.

My expertise is that of an academic whose primary research concerns the History of Congressional Apportionment. Associated topics include districting and voting. All are essential components in a larger picture framed by the question, what is Representation in our American democracy? History, from the time of the Framers of our Constitution, has evolved answers on the premise that the source of governmental power must come from *the people*.

Fundamental to American democracy is the right to vote. The ballot is the people's main voice box for representation. The structure of the ballot determines how much input an individual voter has in an election. The current system of structuring the ballot is to list the options (or candidates) with the instruction, Vote for One. If there are only two options, then there is no problem. The winner is simply determined by majority vote.

However, a problem exists when there are three or more options. In this event, the Vote for One instruction is the most limiting among ballot possibilities, allowing the smallest voice for a voter. The voter

gets to say something about one candidate, and then the input is over. As a result, a substantial number vote strategically rather than honestly out of concern for "throwing away their vote." Vote for One does not allow many voters to support their candidate of first choice without the fear that they will elect their least-liked candidate.

The worst-case scenario of Vote for One is that the least desirable candidate may win the election because the winner is simply the plurality winner. If there are three candidates, then two well-liked candidates may split the popular vote 33% to 31%, leaving a widely-disliked candidate the winner with 36% of the vote.

The confusion and agony of strategy vs. honesty when there are three or more ballot options can be overcome by replacing Vote for One by Ranked-Choice Voting (RCV).

The ballot would still list the same options, but the instruction to the voter is to rank the options rather than merely choose one. Thus, opportunity for voter input is extended to each ballot option, not restricted to just one option.

Of course, if a voter simply wants to just vote for one, then they only need to mark their first choice; hence, the Vote for One structure still remains for voters who want that structure. With RCV, voters who want to make additional input may continue by ranking their 2nd, 3rd, etc., choices. This supports the voter who wants to be a greater participant in our democratic republic.

There are clear advantages to ranked-choice voting.

1. Voters get to provide more input and thus have more say-so in the election. Voter apathy induced by the belief that their vote doesn't really count or doesn't matter is diminished. When no candidate wins a majority of the vote in the first round of counting, then those additional ranks make a difference! The final winner is a majority, not just a plurality, winner.

2. Voters get the opportunity to vote for candidates they support, not just vote for someone as a way to vote against another they oppose most.

3. Voters can vote honestly without the guilt of throwing their vote away or playing a spoiler role and enabling their least-liked candidate to win.

4. Voters get to decide how much input they want to have given the ballot options by choosing how many candidates to rank, from one to all.

5. Ranked-choice voting decreases the probability that the least-desired candidate wins the election.

I applaud Alaska for taking the rights and input of voters seriously and considering Ranked-Choice Voting. In the early phase of the development of this nation, voting rights were usually limited to white males, at least 21 years old, who were propertied and Protestant. The evolution of voting rights in America now provides equal voting opportunity to all adult citizens in good standing. It is time that we further include the structure of the ballot in voting rights and upgrade that structure to Ranked-Choice Voting.

Thank you for your considerations.

[Due to technical difficulties, Mr. Biles' testimony was cut short, but it is provided above in its entirety from his written testimony submitted to the committee.]

[9:14:48 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ZULKOSKY opened public testimony on HB 390.

[9:15:19 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease 9:15 a.m.

[9:16:01 AM](#)

DAVID NEES, Education Researcher, Alaska Policy Forum, noted that he had given written testimony to Representative Saddler. He stated that Minnesota has RCV in some of its cities and is looking to ban it statewide. He said, "In the Cambridge City elections, it does indeed have an effect. The effect is that

populations of about 10 percent have more chance of getting candidates put on the city council; there's a very excellent article about that." He indicated that in 1947, the people of Alaska wanted an open ballot. He added, "That's been struck down a couple times by courts. So, whatever you do, it's probably going to go that way. A better option, probably, is to make it available to municipalities to adopt, like plastic bags."

MR. NEES mentioned that the Maine Initiative was a democratic experiment. He indicated that part of [the purpose of RCV] is to change the way Presidential elections are done, to [eliminate] popular voting. He said one effect of RCV is that it discourages voters from voting because it is more complex. Mr. Nees mentioned the Olympics using a system other than RCV. He said one thing that RCV does is produce happier voters, because "they get to vote on everybody," and occasionally the candidates that get elected are the fringe candidates that would not get elected under the current popular vote process.

[9:18:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER acknowledged he had received written testimony from Mr. Nees. He asked whether RCV makes it more difficult for people to publicly endorse a candidate or give money to a candidate's campaign. He questioned the same about the popular vote.

[Due to technical difficulties, Mr. Nees was not available to respond.]

[9:19:56 AM](#)

MARILYN RUSSELL opined that RCV is a way to make sure the person elected is the most popular, because "if the person elected is not your first choice, she or he could be your second choice, and chances are you won't hate the winner." She said [that under the RCV system], all candidates have a vested interest in all voters, because if they are not the voter's first choice, they may be his/her second choice. Further, voters don't have to vote against their conscience. Ms. Russell talked about society getting to see actual choices, not just who the winner is. She indicated that perhaps RCV would be used for primaries and then be expanded to [General Elections]. She said people may be disgruntled initially because of the multitude of choices; however, her research has shown her that "after a few years, people do sit up and pay more attention," and voter

turnout does increase. She remarked that under RCV, people are not forced to [rank] candidates but instead can vote for just one. She said RCV would make candidates work harder not to alienate people through negative campaigning. She expressed support for RCV.

[9:24:10 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR PARISH offered his impression that presently politics in the U.S. is weighted toward parties and "other groups of wealth and influence." He asked whether Ms. Russell agreed and if she thought HB 390 would do anything "to redress that."

MS. RUSSELL answered, "Yes, it does." She continued, "It certainly will put in different levels of economics and ... people of all different ethnicities and cultures and who has how much money, and all, and it would definitely address leveling the playing field. I like that idea, too." She said she is alarmed by gerrymandering, so, "this is a wonderful idea."

[9:26:10 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ZULKOSKY announced that HB 390 was held over.

[9:26:33 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:26 a.m.