

Voice for Democracy

Newsletter of Californians for Electoral Reform

Fall 2010

President's Letter: BIG Election Coming Up!

YOUR HELP IS NEEDED

By Steve Chessin

As I mentioned in the last issue, our first item of business for this CfER year is ensuring the success of the IRV elections in Oakland, Berkeley, and San Leandro this November. The Alameda County Registrar of Voters wants to have an IRV expert in every polling place, and we hope CfER members from all over will volunteer to help. According to California law, any registered voter in California can help at any polling place.

As I also reported in the last issue, the Alameda County RoV was under the impression that he could only hire poll workers who also live in Alameda County. That turned out just to be a tradition, a tradition that they are suspending for this election so that they can take advantage of CfER members (and others) who live outside of Alameda County but want to help as (what the RoV is calling) "Ranked Choice Voting Facilitators".

I myself have so volunteered, as have other CfER members, and if you live within reasonable driving distance of Oakland or Berkeley (they already have enough for San Leandro) I urge you to apply as well. To apply, go to <http://www.co.alameda.ca.us/rov/workers.htm> and use either the paper form or the online form.

(As I write this neither form has an explicit method of indicating that you want to be an "RCV Facilitator". If it doesn't when you go to apply, my recommendation would be the following:

(a) If you use the paper form, just write on it "I want to be an RCV Facilitator" where it asks you if you want to be an Inspector, Judge, or Clerk.

(b) If you use the online form, put "(I want to be an RCV Facilitator)", including the parentheses, as (or after) your middle name.



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In either case, after you submit the application call 510-272-6971, ask for Jan Blythe, and tell him that you want to be an RCV Facilitator. If he's not there leave him a message to that effect.)

In addition to working on Election Day, RCV Facilitators need to take a two-hour training class. The classes will be given Mondays through Saturdays, all day and into the evening, starting Monday, September 27th and continuing through the end of October.

It may be the case that all the positions will have been filled by the time you receive this newsletter, so I would call them first to find out. Identify yourself as a CfER member when you do so.

On other fronts, both CfER Board member Richard Winger and myself are two of the six plaintiffs in a lawsuit against SB 6, the legislation that implements Proposition 14, the so-called Top Two Open Primary that was passed last June. While CfER was strongly opposed to Proposition 14, our participation in the lawsuit is as individuals, and not as official representatives of CfER. A hearing on our request for a preliminary injunction was held on Tuesday September 14th. As expected, our request was denied, so we filed an appeal on September 29. There will be an update on the lawsuit in the next newsletter.

Steve Chessin has served as President of CfER since 2001 and was Co-President from 1999-2001.

Titanic Ballot Props 20 & 27: Reforms without Reform

By Casey Peters and Jim Stauffer

Californians for Electoral Reform (CfER) takes no position on any of the November 2010 ballot measures, although two impact directly on the conduct of future elections. We are dedicated to real reforms that make votes effective, something not done by any recent "reform" propositions.

Propositions 20 and 27 feel too much like rearranging deckchairs on the Titanic, for different reasons. Both are direct responses to the Citizens Redistricting Commission (CRC), which was established (**continued on page 2**)



Titanic Ballot Props 20 & 27: Reforms with Reform (continued from page 1)

by Proposition 11 in November 2008. The CRC is just now being formed to draw California's legislative districts for the next decade. Basically, Proposition 20 would expand the CRC's function to include Congressional districts, while Proposition 27 would abolish the CRC altogether, returning redistricting authority to the State Legislature.

Why the Titanic analogy? Neither Prop 20 nor 27 addresses the fundamental problem: fair representation. The existing system of single-member districts for partisan races often results in a large percentage of voters being represented by a politician for whom they did not vote. These Propositions will not change that, they will just change who is under- or over-represented in each district. The best way to diminish this phenomenon of "mis-representation" in legislative elections is to implement proportional representation voting in multi-member districts. Without this, misrepresentation will predominate, elections will not achieve proportional representation of voters' preferences, and the voices of millions of voters will be barred from the halls of government.

One paradox of single-member districts is that the more competitive a district is (i.e. closer partisan balance), the larger the number will be of voters who are represented by a politician they oppose.

Proposition 11 introduces another paradox in redistricting single-member deckchairs... whoops, we mean districts. It sets criteria for keeping cities and counties from being split, and also criteria for keeping "communities of interest" from being split. Communities of interest often consist of populations, either contiguous or in pockets, that cross city or county lines. How successful do you think the CRC will be at drawing single-member district boundaries that meet both criteria? Someone is going to lose in that conflict.

While the CRC will have a partisan balance of 35.7% each for Democrats and Republicans, with 28.6% of the commission in neither party, California's voter registration as of May 24, 2010 consisted of 44.5% Democrats, 30.8% Republicans, 24.7% other – meaning the CRC is a boon to Republicans. That explains why the billionaire financial sponsor of Proposition 20, Charles T. Munger Jr., wants to extend CRC duties to include redistricting the Congressional delegation from California. Also, if just three Republican commissioners refuse to approve district maps, the process will devolve to "special masters" appointed by the California Supreme Court, all seven of whose justices were themselves appointed by Republican

governors.

On the other hand, the billionaire financial sponsor of Proposition 27, Haim Saban, wants to abolish the as-yet untested Citizens Redistricting Commission, and to shift district drawing power back to California's State Legislature where 62.5% of seats are held by Democrats.

Ultimately, neither Proposition 20 nor 27 will eliminate the wording in California's Constitution that mandates single-member districts for legislative races. Therefore, CfER refuses to endorse either partisan interest in this destructive distraction of shifting deckchairs. The best thing to be said for these propositions is that their implementation will prove that an inadequate ship sinks no matter where you place the deckchairs. This creates an opportunity for us to talk to losers of the deckchair game about how multi-member districts using proportional representation could, much more often, satisfy both the CRC criteria of contiguous districts and representing communities of interest.

Board member Casey Peters is CfER's new county coordinator in Riverside County, where he recently moved. Jim Stauffer is county coordinator in Santa Clara County.



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Unitarians Like PR and IRV

By Pete Martineau

The Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento began using PR/IRV for its elections in May, 2005. I had learned it was simple to get and download free ranked ballot software from Steve Willett of Initiative Computing and CfER in Oakland a year or so before. I started a campaign in early '05 to get our trustees to okay its use. I first began one-on-one discussions with those trustees and alpha-type congregation members I knew well. Getting their general agreement, I went to a trustee meeting and presented the benefits. We had historically used the usual winner take all plurality election method. As usual for most people, they mostly didn't understand, but did understand PR/IRV likely wouldn't be seen as a radical change by insiders, a very important consideration in any hierarchy. They approved the change. Next was explaining the change to the congregation in the newsletter before the election, and how voters should rank candidates.

I asked Steve Willett if he would help me download the software, and show me how to count ballots on a

laptop. Steve immediately said that he would instead come to Sacramento with his laptop and run the count. He came on his motorcycle with his wife and did us a great job. (Thanks again, Steve.) Only one office had more than two candidates, which is normal. Some voters ranked only their first choices, and quite a few voted with the "X". Before he left, Steve downloaded the software on two church PCs. Chuck O'Neil ran the software for subsequent elections, including seeing that the office printed the ballots properly and on time. Shades of San Francisco and Oakland insider reactions, in early '06 the trustees, without consulting Chuck or me, announced the PR/IRV wouldn't be used for the May election-"too complicated". I sent emails of protest to about 40% of the congregation (everybody that had a listed email in the church directory), with a copy to the trustees. The executive committee decided to allow the ranked ballot again, and have not interfered since.

Our church culture now accepts the ranked ballot, few still use it incorrectly, almost nobody uses the "X" anymore, and a few trustee at large (**continued on page 4**)



Join CfER or Renew Your Membership Now

I want to: Join Renew Update my information

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Email address: _____

I would like to receive the newsletter by: Email Postal mail

Choose a membership program:

One year: Standard - \$25 \$50 \$75 Low budget - \$6

Sustainer: \$ _____ per Month (min \$5) Quarter (min \$15) Year (min \$60)

Make checks payable to "Californians for Electoral Reform" or "CfER" and mail to CfER, P.O. Box 128, Sacramento, CA 95812, or visit <http://www.cfer.org/join>.



Unitarians Like PR and IRV

(continued from page 3)

and executive contests over the last six years have been won using the ranked PR and IRV ballots.

I had previously tried the ranked ballot nationwide on Unitarians. I went to the national Unitarian conventions in 1999 and 2000 to sell PR/IRV. The convention bylaws elect using IRV for the president and moderator, modeled after Robert's Rules. Each convention selects two subjects to send out to the congregations for discussion and possible national selection a year later. PR/IRV came in a distant third both years. The problem of the day, things like AIDS, Darfur, Iraq, etc, win congregational study, and people say like "New voting system, what's the problem with the way we do it now?" Perhaps with today's great increase in national angst over legislative representation, the Unitarian association might agree to a national study recommending national use of PR/IRV.

CfER board member Pete Martineau is county coordinator in Sacramento County, and is a member of the FairVote board.

The Wilma Rule Award

By Steve Chessin

Wilma Rule was an Adjunct Professor of Political Science at the University of Nevada, Reno. She was the author or editor of at least four books: *Russian Women in Politics and Society*, *The U.S. House of Representatives: Reform or Rebuild?*, *United States Electoral Systems: Their Impact on Women and Minorities*, and *Electoral Systems in Comparative Perspective: Their Impact on Women and Minorities*, as well as numerous articles, both scholarly and popular.

She was one of CfER's earliest members, and was active on our Board I believe from the very beginning, and active with the organization as long as her health allowed. She died on January 15, 2004.

Wilma Rule was a longtime champion of women's representation. Her research challenged conventional notions about the reasons for women's lack of political representation in the United States, much lower than in other countries. Many advocates for women's representation hold the view that if more women simply ran for office, or if women candidates had more (continued on page 5)

Local Chapters and Contacts

Alameda County	Joan Strasser	510-653-3174	
El Dorado County	Paula Lee	916-400-3802	
Fresno County	Ryan Dunning	559-930-6073	
Humboldt County	David Ogden	707-445-8304	
Long Beach	Gabrielle Weeks	562-252-4196	
Los Angeles Area	David Holtzman	310 477-1914	
Marin County	Bob Richard	415-256-9393	
Mendocino County	Don Rowe	707-463-2456	
Monterey County	Michael Latner	805-466-0821	for email addresses visit
Sacramento County	Pete Martineau	916-967-0300	www.cfer.org/chapters
San Bernardino County	Matt Munson	909-984-5083	
San Diego	Edward Teyssier	858-546-1774	
San Luis Obispo County	Michael Latner	805-466-0821	
San Mateo County	Mike Northrup	415-753-3395	
Santa Barbara County	Michael Latner	805-466-0821	
Santa Clara County	Jim Stauffer	408-432-9148	
Santa Cruz County	Michael Latner	805-466-0821	
Yolo County/Davis	Pete Martineau	916-967-0300	



The Wilma Rule Award (continued from page 4)

campaign financing, then far more women would be elected. But Professor Rule's research of electoral methods and women's representation around the world demonstrates the deficiency of that viewpoint. Her research and that of others showed unequivocally that if you want more women elected to your legislatures, the single most important change is to get rid of our 18th-century winner-take-all electoral system in favor of more modern "full representation" electoral methods.

As a strong believer in proportional representation, Wilma was concerned that our growing interest in IRV would distract us from our primary mission of PR. We owe it to her to not let that happen, and in her memory we have created the Wilma Rule Memorial Award, awarded to that person or persons who have done the most to advance the cause of proportional representation in California during the preceding CfER year.

The following people and organizations have received the Wilma Rule Memorial Award:

May 22, 2004:

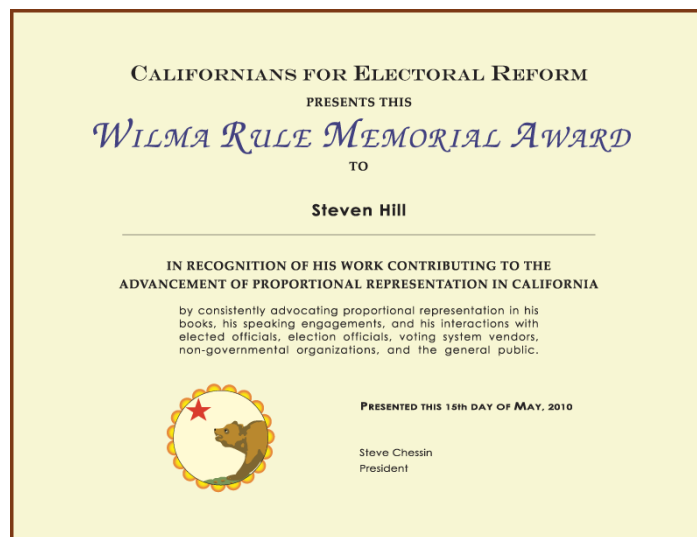
Casey Peters – for overseeing the KPFK Choice Voting elections.

Les Radke – for overseeing the KPFA Choice Voting elections.

The Associated Students of the University of California, Davis – for using Choice Voting in their elections.

May 14, 2005:

State Senator Debra Bowen – for authoring SB 596, which would have allowed general law cities and counties to use IRV and Choice Voting.



Chris Jerdonek – for getting the City of Davis Governance Task Force to recommend that Davis use Choice Voting to elect its City Council.

Steve Willett – for many years of service conducting the Choice Voting CfER elections.

May 20, 2006:

Brian Neesby – for getting the student government of UCLA to adopt Choice Voting for its elections.

May 19, 2007:

Hon. Mark Leno and Hon. Gene Mullin – for co-authoring AB1294, which would have allowed general law cities and counties to use IRV and Choice Voting.

City Council of Davis – for putting Measure L on the ballot. (Measure L was the advisory measure indicating that the voters wanted to use choice voting to elect their City Council.)

Voters of City of Davis – for passing Measure L.

Rob Dickinson – for shepherding AB1294 through the legislative process.

May 10, 2008:

Hon. Tom McClintock – for being the only Republican legislator with the vision and courage to vote for AB 1294, and in so doing providing CfER with an opening for more effective outreach to Republican organizations.

Hon. Matt Rexroad – for blogging favorably about AB 1294 at FlashReport.com, and in so doing helping CfER to be more effective in its outreach to Republican organizations.

May 30, 2009:

Mark Paul and Micah Weinberg of the New America Foundation – for writing *Remapping a Nation Without States: Personalized Full Representation for California's 21st Century*, that described a proposed PR system for the State of California.

May 15, 2010:

Steven Hill – for consistently advocating proportional representation in his books, his speaking engagements, and his interactions with elected officials, election officials, voting system vendors, non-governmental organizations, and the general public.

Steve Chessin has served as President of CfER since 2001 and was Co-President from 1999-2001.



About CfER . . .

Californians for Electoral Reform (CfER) is a statewide citizens' group promoting election reforms that ensure that our government fairly represents the voters. We are a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with members from across the political spectrum. Since our founding in May of 1993, our numbers have grown from about two dozen to hundreds of members participating in local chapters across California.

OUR ELECTORAL SYSTEM IS IMPORTANT

The method by which we vote has dramatic consequences, and nearly one third of the state's electorate consistently goes without a representative that speaks for them in Sacramento. The choice of electoral system can determine whether there will be "spoilers" or vote-splitting effects, majority sweeps of representation on city councils, or pervasive negative campaigning. The choice of electoral system determines whether minority perspectives or racial and ethnic minority groups receive fair representation or get shut out of the process entirely.

CfER IS THE LEADING ADVOCACY GROUP FOR THESE REFORMS IN CALIFORNIA

CfER works for legislation that would allow cities and counties to adopt voting methods that allow people to rank their preferences when they vote. CfER also works with activists in its local chapters to enact fair election methods in cities and counties across the state.

For more information visit www.cfer.org/aboutus

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