



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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Rep. Mark Spreitzer & Sen. Chris Larson Introduce Ranked-choice Voting Bill

MADISON- Today, State Representative Mark Spreitzer (D-Beloit) and State Senator Chris Larson (D-Milwaukee) introduced a proposal to implement a new voting system, called ranked-choice voting (RCV), for most Wisconsin elections. Like most states, Wisconsin currently uses a plurality-winner election system where the candidate who receives the most votes wins, even when they do not have a majority.

“Ranked-choice voting is an innovative and practical way to make sure people can vote for who they truly want, rather than vote strategically for who they think has the best chance of winning,” Rep. Mark Spreitzer said. “Ranked-choice voting also ensures that those who serve in elected office are there because they have the support of a clear majority of voters.”

“These past four years have shown us all how dangerous extremist candidates can be. RCV makes it much harder for these candidates to win, increases voter choice, and would save state and local governments millions of dollars by eliminating the low-turnout February Primary. If we want a government that truly reflects our Wisconsin values, ranked-choice voting is a huge step forward,” said Sen. Chris Larson.

In a ranked-choice voting system, voters rank candidates in order of preference (1 for favorite, 2 for second favorite, etc.). If a candidate wins an absolute majority (50% plus one vote) based on voters’ first-choice preferences, that candidate wins. However, if no candidate wins a majority, the candidate with the fewest first-choice preferences is eliminated, and their votes are reassigned to other candidates based on those voters’ next preference. This process repeats itself until a candidate receives a majority of the vote and is elected. This system is sometimes referred to as instant-runoff voting. Ranked-choice voting combines paper ballots designed to allow preferential ranking, computing power to count votes quickly, and the concept of a runoff election to produce an electoral system that ensures majority support for elected officials without the extra expense of an entirely separate runoff election. Implementing ranked-choice voting in Wisconsin would eliminate the need for the nonpartisan February primary, providing significant savings to the state and municipalities by eliminating the costs associated with administering that election.

Under Wisconsin’s current system, a candidate may win an election with far less than 50% of the vote. This scenario becomes more likely the more candidates enter a race. This problem commonly shows up in crowded party primaries and general elections with third-party candidates. Voters fear wasting their vote should they choose their favorite candidate, which could create a spoiler effect and help elect their least favorite candidate.

The same principles apply to elections with multiple winners, like city councils, school boards, and town and village boards. This RCV process, called single transferrable vote, uses the same ranking system to determine multiple winners when multiple seats are being elected.

Ranked-choice voting is not new, and is gaining more widespread adoption across the United States. Many cities, like Minneapolis, already use it and New York City voters recently approved ranked-choice voting by a 3-to-1 margin; the state of Maine approved ranked-choice voting by referendum in 2016 and 2018, and Alaska voters approved the use of a form of ranked-choice voting in a November 2020 referendum which moved the state's general elections to RCV; and prominent corporations and organizations, such as the Academy Awards, use ranked-choice voting. The basic concept of using runoff elections to ensure that an elected position is filled by someone receiving majority support has been in use for hundreds of years and types of runoff elections are currently used in states like Texas, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Vermont.

This legislation is supported by FairVote, a nonpartisan champion of electoral reforms that give voters greater choice, a stronger voice, and a representative democracy that works for all Americans. FairVote's team helped ensure that this proposal builds on lessons learned from implementation of ranked-choice voting across the country.

"In the November Presidential election, Wisconsin once again saw a razor thin statewide election with third party candidates receiving more votes than the margin between the major party candidates. Ranked choice voting gives voters the tools they need to better express their preferences and delivers decisive and timely results," said Rob Richie, President and CEO of FairVote. "I am pleased to see Wisconsin joining so many state legislatures in considering ranked choice voting legislation."

"Wisconsin has been a leader in voting rights and electoral systems in the United States, and implementing ranked-choice voting will give voters a better way to make their voices heard," Rep. Spreitzer said.

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MEDIA NOTE: [Here is a 1 minute video](#) that helps explain rank choice voting.