

June 13, 2007

Dear Council members,

I am writing on behalf of the San Fernando Valley Young Democrats (SFVYD) regarding today's Rules and Elections Committee Hearing, on the topic of increasing voter turnout.

As a partisan club organization, SFVYD has worked since its inception to increase voter turnout in local, state and federal elections, particularly among young voters 18-35. Today I'd like to voice my support for a pair of voting reforms that I believe would lead to greater turnout and voter participation.

First, I am very much in favor of adopting a "ranked choice" or instant runoff voting (IRV) system in nonpartisan local elections. One of the biggest complaints we hear from young voters is "**too many elections**" - last month's school board runoff being a perfect example. In my area, voters were asked to drive to the polls and vote again for their preferred school board and city college trustee candidate after voting only a month before. Few would argue that any new information was learned about these candidates in the time between the primary and runoff elections. Certainly the costs and difficulty of getting the word out about a second election were substantial, and turnout was abysmal. Had the first primary election utilized IRV, we could have settled the election in one easy round.

IRV has been used in San Francisco since 2004 with positive results: higher voter turnout, greater satisfaction with the vote, and millions of dollars in savings. Voters find the process of ranking candidates in order of preference easy to do.

Additionally, SFVYD is supportive of adopting a voluntary Clean Money public financing system for elections. While we understand the need for money in politics, we believe a system that requires candidates to spend more time fundraising than meeting directly with voters is dysfunctional and undemocratic. Not every race will lend itself to public financing, but in cases where it is utilized voters will benefit through more interaction with candidates. Furthermore, these candidates will be freed from the perception that they are beholden to deep-pocketed special interests. We believe greater trust in the system will lead to increased voter turnout on Election day.

Finally, I would like to encourage candidates of all stripes to consider issues of special importance to young voters when campaigning. Today's young people find it harder to afford college, find decent salaried jobs with good benefits, buy a home, secure health insurance and avoid credit card debt. Addressing these issues in a practical way has the potential to energize young voters and engage them in the political process.

Thank you for your attention to the issue of voter turnout, and for giving SFVYD the opportunity to add our perspective.

Sincerely,

Damian Carroll  
President, SFVYD