

April 27, 2022

Dear Equitable Representation Subcommittee,

I served on the 2015/16 Multnomah County Charter Review Committee and have been listening in on your recent meetings.

I pay attention to politics and the work of our elected officials. I read a lot and research candidates so that I can make informed choices when I vote. People often ask me how I plan to vote.

To summarize the points I want to make in this comment:

- **Please make sure you understand the cost of adding County Commissioners.**
- **I value spring primaries that narrow crowded candidate fields**
- **I see value in alternative ballot structures but have a lot of concerns.**

Please make sure you understand the cost of adding County Commissioners. Today, each Commissioner has a budget that allows them to hire 3 staff who handle policy research and constituent communications. Each Commissioner is paid a good but not excessive salary (a little over \$100,000 if I remember correctly), which makes the positions attractive. I suspect that if you add up the Commissioners salary, salary for their staff, benefits, office space and overhead it totals something over \$500,000 per Commissioner. In a tight county budget, funding for additional Commissioners is money that isn't available for health care programs, addiction treatment, shelter and housing for the houseless. It is a tradeoff to be understand.

I value having spring primaries that narrow crowded fields of candidates so I can research fewer candidates in depth before fall elections. It can be difficult to get good information and judge voter support for a substantial number of candidates, even if you have the time and inclination to do that work. The primary shows which candidates have broad enough voter support to be worth the time investment. In a crowded race, I can't always pick out the best and most viable candidates before the primary, so while I'll pick someone to vote for, I'm often grateful for the primary weeding weaker candidates out before the fall.

I am torn about adopting a new ballot structure. Sometimes when faced with a field with 2 or more good candidates (consider some recent city council races), I wish we had a ballot structure that allowed me to indicate more than one choice. But the STAR voting system terrifies me, and I'm not sure I'd even want to fill out a ranked choice ballot for a big election with many candidates in a lot of races.

1. I've always loved filling out standardized multiple-choice tests by filling in ovals. But I've learned that what's easy for me is difficult for others. Filling out a STAR ballot may seem

easy to some, but filling it out fully requires a lot more information and many more complicated choices than a winner take all vote, and many more bubbles to accurately fill in. Remember (or look up if you are too young) the butterfly ballot disaster in the Florida Presidential election of 2000. I worry that voter participation would drop in the real world because some folks would find it confusing or intimidating. Can you find several examples of real world use on complex ballots, looking not just at voter satisfaction but also whether participation dropped over time (hard to judge, but an important question). Do fewer voters fully vote their ballots in those systems?

2. The potential for voter confusion and errors will be greatly exacerbated if voters have to use winner-take-all, ranked choice, and STAR voting on the same ballot.
3. To properly and fully vote the STAR system, you need to have perfect knowledge of all the candidates and be able to accurately evaluate their relative desirability. It looks easy on a hypothetical ballot, but I would find it daunting in a real election. In a winner take all system I only need to pick the best candidate -- once I've done that, I can ignore the rest. In ranked choice I need to rank them, which is more work and more decisions, but I could probably manage despite needing to make more difficult choices. In the STAR system, though, I have the added option to give some candidates the same rating. I'd need to have good information about all the candidates to do that, and I need to make a lot of judgements. One of the reasons I love vote by mail is that I can see all the candidates and questions and make educated decisions instead of having to guess how to vote an unexpected question while standing in a voting booth. If I was faced with a long ballot with a lot of candidates for many offices, I can't imagine how I'd sort through all the decisions required. Races for judges with 2 candidates I can't get any information about except voter pamphlet statements (which often aren't very helpful). Races for the Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue Board with three candidates that I can't get much information about. How do I vote a race with 3 candidates -- one that I like, one that I strongly dislike, and one who entered just to see their name on the ballot? Do I need to rate them 1, 2, and 3? Can I rate them 1, 5, 5 or 1, 4, 5? What are the implications of each of those three options? Multiply those questions times a couple dozen races and I'm worn out.
4. I am also concerned about the effect these voting methods will have on voter confidence that their ballots have been accurately counted. I know our elections are well run and safe, but there are growing numbers of people deliberately calling vote counts into question and demanding audits. Will the complications of ranked choice voting or STAR vote counting undermine voter confidence that votes were properly counted?

5. Are the advantages of STAR or ranked choice voting lost if a large share of voters only vote for one candidate in each race? Would that give disproportionate influence to people who fully vote their ballots? Another question to see if there is real world data for.

Thank you for your thoughtful work. I appreciate the time you are taking to research the issues before you. Please let me know if you have any questions about my comments.

Carol Chesarek