



# Summary of Meeting with Jeanne Massey and John Hottinger

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle, Bloomington, MN 55437

*Friday, March 7, 2008*

**Guest speakers:** **Jeanne Massey**, executive director, FairVote Minnesota, and **John Hottinger**, former state senator

**Present:** Verne C. Johnson, chair; Chuck Clay, Bill Frenzel (by phone), Jim Hetland, and Jim Olson (by phone)

**A. Context of the meeting** —The issue of Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) has been discussed in several previous meetings of the Civic Caucus. The Civic Caucus in a statement issued late in 2007 urged that political campaign pollsters start ranking candidates in order of preference. In today's meeting, leaders of IRV are bringing the Civic Caucus up-to-date on recent developments.

**B. Welcome and introductions** —Verne welcomed and introduced Jeanne Massey, executive director, FairVote Minnesota, and John Hottinger, former state senator. FairVote Minnesota is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that is leading the effort to institute Instant Runoff Voting in Minnesota. Massey was lead organizer of the successful Minneapolis Better Ballot Campaign for Instant Runoff Voting in 2006. She is a research and planning consultant specializing in urban and social services planning, facilitation and community organizing and served 10 years as the executive director of the South Hennepin Regional Planning Agency. She holds a master's degree in Regional and Community Planning from Iowa State University and a bachelor's degree in Business and Spanish from the University of Northern Iowa.

Hottinger, a consultant and author, served in the Minnesota State Senate from 1991-2006 and was DFL majority leader in 2003. He was an officer of the Council of State Governments from 2001-2005 and served as chair of the council in 2004. Hottinger is a lawyer. He has a bachelor of science degree in economics and journalism from the University of St. Thomas and a law degree from Georgetown University.

**C. Comments and discussion** —Massey's and Hottinger's comments and in discussion with the Civic Caucus the following points were raised:

**1. IRV explained** —Massey distributed a flyer that explains IRV: IRV allows voters to rank candidates according to their preference, first choice, second choice, third choice, etc. If a candidate receives a majority of first choice votes, that candidate wins. If not, the candidate with the fewest votes is

eliminated and votes cast for this candidate are redistributed to the other candidates, based on the second choices of the voters supporting the candidate who is eliminated. This process is repeated until one candidate has a majority of votes.

Massey and Hottinger said "ranked order voting" perhaps is more descriptive than "IRV" but IRV has become the more popular term.

## **2. Major reasons for IRV** —Massey and Hottinger outlined the following reasons for IRV:

**a. Assures a winning candidate will always receive a majority of votes cast** —No longer will a winning candidate receive less than a majority, which happens frequently now when more than two candidates are on the ballot for a given office. The IRV process assures that the winner has a majority. They noted that in Minnesota the winning candidate in the last several general elections for Governor received fewer than a majority of votes cast.

**b. Empowers voters who support candidates with moderate views** —With IRV, candidates will need to attract other voters besides those constituting their core base of support. Thus candidates will have incentives to adopt positions on issues that will attract a broad spectrum of voters. Without IRV candidates are inclined to pay more attention to voters on the far left or far right and less attention to those in the broad middle. Massey distributed a report from John Porter, former member of Congress and a member of the Board of Trustees at the Brookings Institution that urges IRV to bring moderate and independent voters back into the election process.

They emphasized that IRV would have the effect of reducing negative campaigning and reducing the likelihood of polarization and paralysis among lawmakers because candidates could lose support by appealing to a narrow audience.

**c. Reduces the need for primary elections** —Because IRV can produce a majority winner no matter how many candidates, primary elections wouldn't be necessary with IRV, particularly in local elections where all candidates run without party identification. But IRV can be a very valuable asset in state party primaries to assure that a party's nominee will have received majority—not just plurality—support in the primary election.

**d. Increases voter interest and participation** —Studies in Cambridge, MA, which has used IRV since 1941, and San Francisco, CA, and other cities where IRV is used revealed greater voter interest and participation because all attention is focused on the general election.

**3. High degree of voter understanding** —Hottinger and Massey mentioned many cities that have used IRV, some for more than 20 years. They cited exit polls taken in these cities have revealed the vast majority of voters understood IRV when first exposed to the concept: 87 percent, San Francisco, CA; 89 percent, Burlington, VT; 88 percent, Takoma Park, MD; 95 percent, Cary, NC, and 86 percent, Hendersonville, NC. They stressed that, contrary to views of some persons in cities that haven't tried IRV, the system has been working very well.

**4. Current efforts in Minnesota** —FairVote Minnesota has adopted a strategy of working first on local elections, rather than spending a lot of time on legislative or constitutional change. Fair Vote currently is working to establish IRV in cities governed by their own city charters. IRV was adopted in

Minneapolis in a 2006 charter amendment referendum. There is a campaign to put IRV on the ballot this November in Saint Paul, significant interest in IRV in Duluth and growing interest in several cities in southeastern Minnesota and other cities. IRV is scheduled to be implemented in Minneapolis in 2009 but the city is behind schedule in developing a request for proposal to solicit vendor proposals to provide an IRV-capable election equipment solution.

No change in the state constitution would be necessary, Massey and Hottinger said. A bill has been introduced by Sen. Ann Rest and Rep. Steve Simon to provide standards rules for the conduct of IRV elections in Minnesota, but that bill is not likely to pass this session.

**5. IRV works in multi-seat elections** —Massey and Hottinger explained that IRV also works where multiple seats are being filled for the same office, for example, when several candidates are contending at large for two or more seats. If only one seat is being filled, a simple majority in votes of 50 percent plus 1 is required for election. If two seats are being filled, the threshold is 33 percent plus 1. For three seats, 25 percent plus 1.

**6. Popular vote for President** —Massey and Hottinger said FairVote Minnesota also is seeking support for a plan that would make possible a national popular vote for President, without the necessity of a constitutional amendment to abolish the Electoral College. Under the plan, state legislatures would enact legislation that would commit their electors to supporting the winner of the national popular for President as soon as states with a majority of electors enacted similar legislation.

**7. Thanks** —On behalf of the Civic Caucus, Verne thanked Massey and Hottinger for meeting with us today.

***The Civic Caucus* is a non-partisan, tax-exempt educational organization. Core participants include persons of varying political persuasions, reflecting years of leadership in politics and business.**

**A working group meets face-to-face to provide leadership. They are Verne C. Johnson, chair; Lee Canning, Charles Clay, Bill Frenzel, Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland, John Mooty, Jim Olson, Wayne Popham and John Rollwagen.**

**[Click Here](#) to see a biographical statement of each.**