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## Editorial | Our View

# Let's try instant runoff voting

By [Star-Advertiser staff](#)

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State legislators are nearing enactment of a bill that would test the so-called “instant runoff” election system — a method of assuring that the winner of a nonpartisan county election can achieve a majority of support, to better reflect the will of the voters and avoid a runoff election.

If successful, as it has been elsewhere, the system of avoiding a separate runoff election between the top two finishers could be applied to other elections. The system has proven to be fair and cost-saving and deserves enactment.

Lawmakers should make clear that the September elections for nonpartisan county council, mayor or prosecutor races would be eliminated as a preliminary stage leading to a November runoff, if the leading candidate has received only a plurality. All county races should be decided in November using the instant runoff system. The bill needs to be clarified on that point.

The bill unquestionably would apply to special elections held to fill vacancies in mid-term, such as last December’s election following the resignation by Todd Apo from the City Council. Of 14 candidates on the ballot, Tom Berg was elected to succeed Apo with only 18.5 percent of the vote — 2,308 of the 12,534 cast. The system that allowed that to happen is badly flawed.

Under the instant runoff system, voters would designate their top choice for the election and be allowed to add, in order, three other preferences. After all votes are counted and the person at the top has less than 50 percent, candidates receiving less than 1 percent would be eliminated and their voters’ second preferences would be added to the ranking. If no candidate gets at least half the vote after three more rounds of eliminations and preferences from the bottom up, the leader would be

deemed the winner.

This would not be an experiment. It has been used in various cities and states across the country, including California, Minnesota, Tennessee, Maine, Colorado and Illinois. Supporters of the bill also point out that it has been applied in presidential Irish elections, parliamentary elections in Australia and Fiji and mayoral elections in London.

State Rep. Della Au Belatti, the bill's sponsor, says special runoffs could be expanded to other races. If it had been applied to last year's special election for the U.S. House seat vacated by Neil Abercrombie so he could concentrate on his run for governor, Republican Charles Djou would not have been able to win with 39.4 percent plurality. Democratic voters were split between Colleen Hanabusa, then state Senate president, and former U.S. Rep. Ed Case. When it was one-on-one between Djou and Hanabusa last November, Hanabusa won handily.

For now, confining the instant runoff system to elections at the county level would be a useful pilot project. If it is successful, as is likely, we would join Belatti in support of extending it to other levels, including federal special elections.