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*by B Shawn Clark*

## Instant Run-Offs for Military & Overseas Voters in the Offing Proposed Legislation Expands Global Reach of Florida Voting

Calling a new measure to expand voting rights of military men and women stationed overseas, as well as those of Floridians living abroad, a means to guarantee the right to a “republican form of government,” a new law would allow these Florida voters to participate in presidential preference primaries by way of a ranked preference for candidates, also known as an “instant run-off” method of tabulating results of elections. According to the bill analysis for the proposed legislation, by adopting this measure Florida would join five other southern states: Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina, in the use a ranked-choice system for military and overseas voters.

“Currently, unlike these and other states, Florida’s Military and Overseas voter’s presidential preference ballots are outdated by the time they are received, and there is no opportunity to correct this in a run-off election,” the analysis goes on to state, clarifying that “primary elections do not allow voters to make a first choice of the party candidate that they prefer, and a second strategic choice for a candidate they find acceptable. This takes away their constitutional right (to a republican form of government) to demonstrate their preferences for a majority result that produces a candidate with broad and deep support to represent them in the general election.”

The bill would require a step back from the ban on so-called “ranked choice voting” that got caught up in a flurry of election-related laws passed in the last legislative session. “I think ranked choice voting received short shrift treatment last go-round and did not get a full and fair examination as to the value this means of tabulating results of elections offers both to reduce the expense of conducting elections and allowing voters to make their preferences known,” said attorney Bret Clark, who helped draft the proposed legislation for the Green Party of Florida.

The ban on ranked choice voting was adopted in response to efforts by the citizens of the city of Sarasota to adopt instant run-offs to spare the city the added costs of conducting elections to its city council. Other municipal governments across the state were contemplating following suit to reduce their own costs in running elections. The bill analysis states that by forcing local governments to run expensive run-off elections the state government’s ban on ranked choice voting is in effect an “unfunded mandate” that violates the Florida Constitution.

Although there is believed to be a number of senators and representatives that are supportive of the voting rights of Florida’s contingent of military personnel stationed overseas, it is unclear as of yet how many sponsors the legislation will garner in the upcoming legislative session, or whether Governor Ron DeSantis, whose bid for the Republican nomination for president would be impacted by the new law, will support allowing overseas voters to state their preference for who should be elected the next commander in chief of the armed forces of the United States.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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