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The Time is Ripe for Election Reform in San Diego

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It's not West Nile Virus we should be afraid of. It's the plague of corrupt money infecting our public officials. First it was Mayor Murphy, then Congressman Cunningham, and now City Councilmembers Inzunza and Zucchet. With one resignation after another, San Diego will have to conduct its sixth election in 20 months, further straining a city budget already in crisis. There is a solution that can solve both of these problems: clean elections coupled with instant runoff voting.

What are clean elections? It's a system where clean candidates prove themselves serious by collecting a certain number of small contributions. This triggers public financing of their campaigns. They, in turn, agree not to use their own money or exceed prescribed limits. Clean candidates enter public office owing no favors to strip club owners, business interests, millionaire contributors or unions.

This program has been tried and tested in Arizona and Maine, where voters and candidates are pleased with the results. In Maine, the legislature was able to pass a real prescription drug discount program because they were free of pressure from pharmaceutical companies.

How can we finance clean elections? Instant runoff elections would consolidate primary and runoff elections, putting about \$2 million to \$5 million in the pot for each election consolidated. Rather than holding two elections, primary and general, voters could rank their preferences on one ballot. If no candidate receives a majority, normally the top two have to go into a runoff. With Instant Runoff Voting (IRV), the election official looks at the ballots of voters whose candidates were not the top two, and distributes their second choice votes accordingly until one of the top two has a majority.

It's clear that "business-as-usual" is not good enough for San Diego; it's time to make positive change.

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