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CONTACT: Amanda K. Moser, 907-830-7560

Amanda@AlaskansforBetterElections.com

Ranked Choice Voting Produces Winners With Strong Mandates And Outcomes As Diverse As Alaska

Juneau, Alaska – Today, Alaska became the first state in the country to elect its state and federal officials using ranked choice voting, an election system that rewards candidates who build deep and broad voter coalitions.

Alaskan voters have twice now used the open, non-partisan primary and ranked choice voting general election system they adopted by ballot measure in 2020. A near consensus of general election voters (79%) found the new election system simple to use, and most voters took advantage of the opportunity to rank a 2nd and 3rd choice candidate.

“First and foremost, we must thank the Division of Elections for their tireless efforts to educate Alaskans, as well as for running a transparent and secure election. Democracy wouldn’t be possible without the dedication of our election workers and volunteers,” said Bruce Botelho, former Alaska Attorney General and current Chair of Alaskans for Better Elections.

The Alaska Division of Elections (DOE) completed its tabulation of the November 8 general election ballots live on public television station KTOO.org. The results reflected the full spectrum of Alaska voters’ political ideologies, from conservative to moderate Republican and moderate Democrat.

Alaska’s largest voter bloc are neither Republican or Democrat – but unaffiliated. Voter registration numbers show that Republicans make up 24% of the electorate, Democrats total 13%, while unaffiliated voters far outnumber both at 58%. Several candidates succeeded by broadening their campaign to appeal to voters outside of their traditional party base, which helped them earn a majority, often with the support of voters who picked them as their 2nd choice candidates.

Incumbent Republican Gov. Mike Dunleavy won re-election with a majority (50.28%) of the statewide vote in the first round of tabulation. Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski won her race against Republican challenger Kelly Tshibaka with 53.7% of the vote including 2nd and 3rd choice votes.

Democrat Mary Peltola, who eschewed negative campaign tactics and actively asked her opponents’ supporters for their 2nd and 3rd choice votes, won Alaska’s lone seat in the U.S.

House of Representatives for the second time this year with 54.9% of the vote, having previously won the August special election to fill the remainder of the late Rep. Don Young's term.

Alaska voters also saw greater competition under the new rules among the 59 legislative races on the ballot. 22 legislative contests had three or more candidates. Roughly 200 candidates competed for legislative offices this year, giving voters more opportunities to support candidates that best shared their values and priorities.

"The diversity of these results is noteworthy. Alaskans elected candidates across a broad ideological spectrum," said Jason Grenn, Executive Director of Alaskans for Better Elections. "Both Democratic and Republican candidates benefited from RCV tabulation while prevailing in different races. Truly, this new system favors no party – it simply empowers voters and ensures that winning candidates have a mandate to govern and a better understanding of voter preferences."

Under the new system, candidates who built broad coalitions were rewarded by voters. The combination of the open, non-partisan primary and ranked choice voting general reorients the incentives of candidates and elected leaders to campaign to and represent the broadest possible electorate. Candidates must earn the support of a true majority of their district's electorate to win, making it more likely that they are more representative of the people they represent and that they enter office with a stronger mandate to govern.

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