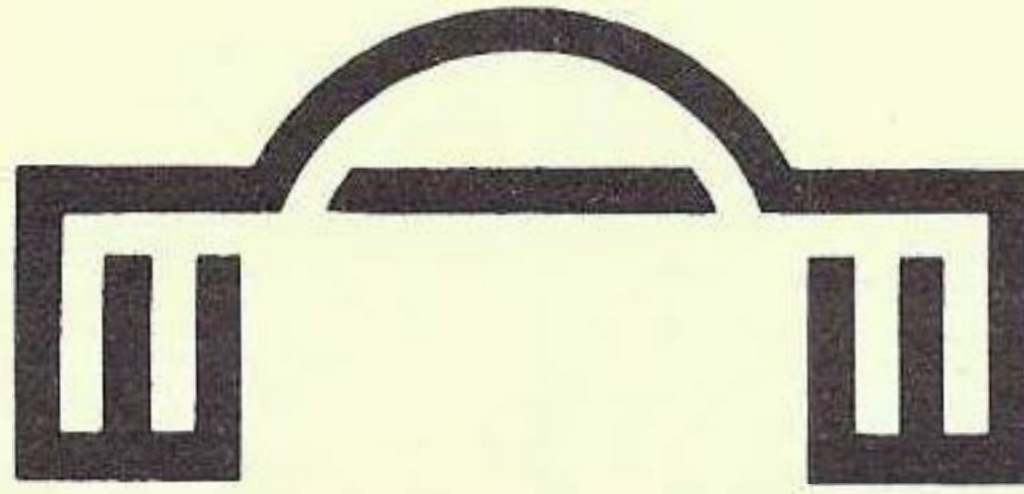




NORTH CAROLINA CENTER FOR  
PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH INC.

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For Immediate Release:

N.C. CENTER ANALYZES RUNOFF PRIMARY PROPOSALS

In his campaign for the Democratic nomination for President, Jesse Jackson has claimed that the runoff primary system in ten Southern states -- including North Carolina -- is helping to perpetuate a low number of black elected officials. In 1983, the N.C. General Assembly considered altering the runoff primary laws of the state but made no changes. The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research recently examined the various proposals that were under consideration in 1983 to see what impact they might have in the future.

Under current state election law, a candidate must receive 50 percent (plus one) of the vote in the first party primary to be a party's nominee. If not, a runoff primary may be held between the two candidates with the most votes. State Representative Kenneth B. Spaulding (D-Durham) proposed that the 1983 N.C. General Assembly amend the law so that a candidate leading the first primary with 40 percent of the vote would win the nomination and avoid a runoff. Five other alternatives to modify the runoff primary were also proposed.

"We were curious as to what the effects of these proposals would have been on past winners," says North Carolina Insight editor Bill Finger. "So, we took each proposal and analyzed whether there would have been a different winning candidate in every statewide and legislative race back to World War II."

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Editor Finger and author Mark Lanier, a graduate student at UNC-CH, found that the various proposals discussed in the 1983 legislature would have altered the outcome of only nine statewide and Congressional races since 1948 (see Table below). In 1948, Charles Johnson captured over 40 percent in the first primary and would have been the Democratic nominee for governor -- not Kerr Scott. In 1978, Luther Hodges Jr., not John Ingram, would have run against Jesse Helms for the U.S. Senate. Jim Holshouser would never have been governor; Jim Gardner, who won well over 40 percent of the vote in the first 1972 Republican gubernatorial primary, would have run against Skipper Bowles in the general election. The state would have sent Frank Porter Graham to Washington in 1950, as well as H. M. "Mickey" Michaux (unless the Republicans pulled off an upset in the general election) in 1982.

The various proposals also would affect the primary system in more subtle ways -- regarding the costs in elections, lack of voter turnout, and effects on minority or women candidates in second primaries. The Center concluded:

° Costs. Of the six proposals discussed in the 1983 General Assembly, only totally abolishing the runoff primary would save the state much money. This is because most of the costs of second primaries are at the county level.

° Voter Turnout. Voter turnout drops significantly in second primaries. During 1950-1982, 23 second primaries were held in North Carolina for gubernatorial, U.S. Senate, and U.S. House races. In 18 of these 23 runoffs, voter turnout was lower in the second primary -- averaging 82.5 percent of the first-primary turnout -- and is even lower in Republican primaries.

° Effect on Minority and Female Candidates. Rep. Spaulding's proposal to declare a candidate leading with 40 percent of the first primary vote the winner might help a few minority and women candidates, but probably not as much as proponents (and opponents) think. Only a plurality system (where the leading vote-getter wins) might significantly improve the chances of election of minority candidates.

*Michaux in '82  
& Sugar Green in '84*

° National Context. Only ten states -- all in the South -- still require a candidate to win 50 percent of the vote in a runoff primary for a party's nomination.

As a result of Jesse Jackson's campaign, legislative observers expect proposals to modify the state's runoff primary to surface again. "We decided to do this research," said Insight Editor Bill Finger, "so that the proponents and opponents would have a better idea in future debates of what the possible effects of abolishing runoffs might be."

**Table 2. Changes in Nominees for Statewide and Congressional Races (1948-82)  
Under Proposed Alternatives to Existing Law**

| Office                        | Party | Year | Winner<br>Under<br>Existing<br>Law (50%) | Winner<br>Under<br>40% Proposal | Winner<br>Under<br>42% Proposal | Winner<br>Under<br>41% Plus<br>3% Lead,<br>Proposal | Winner<br>Under<br>40% Plus<br>5% Lead,<br>Proposal | Winner<br>Under<br>45% Plus<br>15% Lead,<br>Proposal |
|-------------------------------|-------|------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. U.S. Senate                | D     | 1950 | W. Smith                                 | Graham                          | Graham                          | Graham                                              | Graham                                              | Smith                                                |
| 2. U.S. Senate                | D     | 1978 | Ingram                                   | Hodges                          | Ingram                          | Ingram                                              | Hodges                                              | Ingram                                               |
| 3. U.S. House<br>(11th Dist.) | D     | 1956 | Whitener                                 | Gardner                         | Gardner                         | Whitener                                            | Whitener                                            | Whitener                                             |
| 4. U.S. House<br>(3rd Dist.)  | D     | 1976 | Whitley                                  | Love                            | Love                            | Love                                                | Love                                                | Whitley                                              |
| 5. U.S. House<br>(2nd Dist.)  | D     | 1982 | Valentine                                | Michaux                         | Michaux                         | Michaux                                             | Michaux                                             | Valentine                                            |
| 6. Governor                   | D     | 1948 | K. Scott                                 | Johnson                         | Scott                           | Scott                                               | Scott                                               | Scott                                                |
| 7. Governor                   | R     | 1972 | Holshouser                               | Gardner                         | Gardner                         | Holshouser                                          | Holshouser                                          | Holshouser                                           |
| 8. Sec. of State              | D     | 1936 | Eure                                     | Wade                            | Wade                            | Wade                                                | Wade                                                | Eure                                                 |
| 9. N.C. Court<br>of Appeals   | D     | 1982 | Eagles                                   | Wright                          | Wright                          | Eagles                                              | Eagles                                              | Eagles                                               |