

Too few voters deciding the future of Cutler Bay

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Councilmember



The Town of Cutler Bay recently had an election of sorts in which the townsfolk were asked to guide the government on a bunch of changes to our charter.

People are always complaining about the fact that they don't know what is going on in their town and perhaps we in government are somewhat to blame. I don't feel that our PR people do an adequate job but I seem to be somewhat alone in my views.

When I ran for reelection in the last election, I spent a great deal of time standing outside of shopping centers trying to get people to vote for me. I would ask them if they planned to vote in the next election. The typical answer was "What election?"

One of my campaign workers chose a different approach. He would ask if they lived in Cutler Bay. The typical answer was "No, I live in Lakes by the Bay, or Cutler Cay, or worse yet, Cutler Ridge." In reality, these are all part of Cutler Bay.

For this particular referendum we decided to avoid the confusion of adding it to the November ballot and chose to pay the expense of actually mailing the ballots to the 20,450 registered voters in our town. They received a couple of pieces of paper where it was only necessary to color in a few little circles to make their choice *and* we even provided a postage-paid return envelope. They were given at least several weeks to make their choices and mail in their replies. They did — all 1,962 of them, which is 9.59 percent of the electorate.

Granted some of the questions were technical in nature and even I had a hard time figuring them out. Some however were plain and simple and could make a big difference in how this town is governed in years to come. One example was extending term limits for the existing members of the council. (Defeated by 77 percent.)

This always is a tough question. If they are doing a good job, do you want to keep them? If they are performing poorly, this automatically gets rid of them even without an election. What if some are good and some are bad? The same rules unfortunately apply to both.

Of course an actual election would serve the same purpose but with 9 percent voting, who would really decide? Personally, I had mixed emotions about it. If term limits were extended, I might

feel obliged to run for office again and try to continue what I am doing to better our town. Of course the thought of waging another campaign and hearing all the claptrap and lies that are aimed at you is no fun.

Even though I won by what many consider a healthy margin (60/40) I always wonder about the 40 percent and what their beef is. All I heard at the time were complaints about our Code Compliance people, none of which turned out to be true, but somehow I was blamed for the "little old lady" attacks.

Asking friends for campaign money was for me one of the most difficult tasks. Frankly, it feels good knowing that for the next several years I can speak freely without wondering how things might be interpreted. As you know, I was accused of being elitist and prejudiced because of my views on making better use of the busway.

The other issue was something that I myself asked to be placed on the ballot: Raising the salaries of the council from \$600 per month to a whopping \$1,000, and the mayor to \$2,000. (It was defeated by 65 percent.)

Of course most people say us politicians earn enough. Why should the town pay our salaries? We don't need it. Well perhaps there are some on the council who don't. They own businesses, investments, etc., and a puny \$500 per month would be meaningless. I, on the other hand, wait each month for my Social Security check, still work part time to supplement that, keep my wife working four days per week, and hope and pray that the few dollars in my 401K won't disappear.

Yes, I could use the extra cash but even if it passed, I and my fellow council people would not have been eligible. Future incoming candidates however would have been and the raise might just have encouraged others like me to give it a whirl. I will warn you however that the job is the most demanding thing I have ever undertaken, including the time I did morning drive with my radio show and had to awake every morning at 4 a.m. to prepare and then go to my regular job from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

There are not too many people in town able and willing to devote this much time to the job. This is evidenced by the difficulty of even getting people to serve on committees and actually show up for meetings. Perhaps the town, all 1,962 of them, will be given another chance in the future to think about these things. In the meantime, I may just set my sites on the presidency or at least vice presidency. I may be overqualified for both, but what the heck.