

Guest column: Jeff Berding

# Vote no on confusing system of proportional representation for city



After rejecting a return to proportional representation three times previously, voters will again decide whether we want to elect Cincinnati City Council members through this system that is used only in Cambridge, Mass. A return to PR would be a disaster for Cincinnati and should be rejected by the voters.

Currently Council members run citywide in an at-large field of up to 25 to 30 candidates, and voters can choose up to nine candidates on their ballots. Thus, individuals can record up to nine votes in the Council election, allowing them to vote for those Council members and new candidates they feel would move the city forward. Because candidates (and council members) need votes from all over the city to get elected, one must look out for the interests of the entire city and show an ability to work with others to get things done.

Under PR, only one of your can-

didates will get your vote (no longer nine). Voters rank their choices, up to nine, so there is a priority on being a voter's top choice. Such a voting system would bring horrific results to Cincinnati.

PR is designed to allow extreme candidates with a small number of passionate supporters to get elected to City Council, with only 10 percent of the vote (rather than the 35 to 40 percent needed in the current system). This result would mean that,

rather than working to represent the entire city, and balancing individual views with what is in the best interests of the city, council members would simply appeal to their ideological base in order to be their No. 1 choice. Proponents argue that this is an advantage to PR, with the ability for a council member to have a "unanimous" constituency to represent — those who made them their top choice!

Additionally, the need to be No. 1 on individual ballots would bring

a return to the infighting on City Council and new negative campaigning as council members and candidates jockey to be No. 1 on ballots. Rather than being rewarded by voters for quietly moving the city forward, PR candidates benefit for loudly representing the extreme views of their base.

There are more tangible problems with PR. The director of the Board of Elections testified before City Council that the cost of implementing PR would be up to \$3 million, a cost Cincinnati will bear in its entirety. And voter approval of PR this November would result in great confusion over the form of the 2009 City Council election.

Proponents of PR have asserted that the election system on the ballot is just like the presidential primaries. That is like saying a cup of water is just like an ocean because both contain water. In the presidential primary, we did not rank our choices for president as we would if Issue 8 is approved. And under Issue 8, there would be no head-to-head choices, districts,

delegates or conventions, as we have in the presidential primary. Clearly the systems are nothing like each other, and the claim to the contrary is a deliberately deceptive appeal to trick voters.

Proponents of PR also falsely assert that under PR, every vote will count. However, if you vote for all fringe candidates who do not have enough support to win, or all winning candidates who have been declared winners by the time the Board of Elections reviews your ballot, then your vote

is discarded and not tallied for any of your choices. In such cases, your single vote does not count.

The fact is that PR is anti-American and undemocratic. PR was created by a European socialist in the late 1800s. This system is used in Malta, Ireland and Australia in order to "create more fractionalized results with small, often single-issue parties or candidates." If voters want to create a parliamentary style government to enable debates on the national and international issues of the day, Issue 8

is for them. But if voters want a City Council focused on getting local issues done right, vote no.

*Jeff Berding is a member of Cincinnati City Council who was appointed by Mayor Mark Mallory to chair the council committee that oversees city charter changes. He has been vice chair of the Cincinnati Electoral Reform Commission and was co-founder of Build Cincinnati, the reform group that developed and won voter approval for direct election of the stronger mayor system.*