

November 2018 Column

Have you seen those commercials on TV where a person says “that’s not right” when he sees how high his wireless bill is? Then they show images of odd things like carpeted showers and people eating queso dip with their fingers. The guy in the commercial then says with a disgusted look on his face, “that’s not right”.

Now that the elections are over, I will get on my soapbox again because holding our municipal elections concurrent with the general elections is just not right. It’s worse than carpeting your shower and eating queso dip with your fingers!

I don’t know how many of you remember this, but local city and school board elections used to be held on the first Saturday in May. I was on City Council at the time, and despite my protestations and my vote to the contrary, the motion passed, the charter amendment was approved by the voters, and we began holding the elections in November of 2012.

As a side note, all regular elections in Texas must be held on what are called “uniform election dates”. Those dates are the first Saturday in May, and the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

I don’t have a personal dog in this fight anymore, since I am term-limited, and will never, ever seek a public office again. However, because I love this town, and I am concerned about its future, I can tell you now that we should change it back to May – or change it to odd numbered years. I can also tell you due to my personal experience, that the problems associated with having a non-partisan municipal campaign in the midst of a national partisan election are many. It’s just not right.

Municipal elections in Texas are non-partisan. It’s one of the great things about Texas. City officials run and are elected according to their personal individual abilities. Most of city government has nothing to do with being democrat, republican, liberal or conservative. Mayors and councilmembers use common sense, hard work and creativity to serve their constituents, and do not owe allegiance to any particular ideology – at least pertaining to city affairs.

Our local elections are now forced to compete for the attention of voters who are bombarded by the campaigns of the state and national partisan candidates and issues. Campaign signs by the thousands spring up everywhere, totally obscuring anything local. Radio and TV ads are wall-to-wall with partisan caterwauling. It’s extremely difficult for a local guy to get attention. That’s not right.

Municipal candidates are constantly asked to comment on national and state issues which have nothing to do with running a city. They are then forcefully asked what their party affiliation is. This happened to me a lot, and it’s not right.

Because of the unfortunate timing of the charter amendment, it forever tied our mayoral election cycle to the national presidential election. The most important election we can have in our city is now drowned out by the noise of the national presidential election. Hordes of people who vote in presidential elections, but never pay attention to local issues are now casting uninformed coin-flip votes for people about whom they know nothing, and it’s not right.

Here’s the real unpleasant thought - runoffs. Quite often, city elections produce runoffs when more than two candidates are running for the same office. Any runoff after a November general election would land smack dab in the middle of the holiday season. Do you really think people are engaged in local politics during the holidays? You really want to see campaign signs in front yards next to manger scenes or Santa Claus? That’s not right.

We need to get our local elections back to where local issues can be discussed away from a poisonous partisan atmosphere. We need to get back to where a local candidate can be heard and noticed. We need to get back to where the mayor and city council are on the front page of the ballot, not stuck on the last page. We need to get back to where people who come to vote are educated and motivated by the issues and candidates that have had their undivided attention throughout the campaign. We need to move our municipal elections back to May, and that would be right. Just like tiled showers and chips with queso.

Gosh, I love this town!