

RETORT

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It is with some reluctance that I beg to disagree with the notion that "good government has got to go", the final shot of the delightfully written paper presented on March 22, under the marquee of "Ain't Misbehavin'". Reluctant, because I agree with so much of the frustration expressed about the problems of our fair City. And reluctant because the author is a solid and accurate bass in the Literary Club Christmas Choir, on whom I lean heavily whenever I join it. I need him.

He is right in anguishing over the replacement of what was, when I worked there, the largest machine tool company in the world, by big box retailers who peddle the same products as every other retailer. Hell, my office was just about where ladies underpants are now. He is right about the banality of the entertainment industry in town; but he can't claim that it is better in creative class meccas like Hollywood or New York City. I haven't seen or heard the likes of "Oklahoma" or "Most Happy Fella" in decades.

He is right about the embarrassments brought on us by Marge Schott's mouth, Mike Brown's management style, and poor old Pete Rose's denials of the obvious. He is right about the lousy morning paper. He is not totally right about Sheriff Leis; but he is on to something about Sy's martinet ways.

Where I depart from Albert's laundry list of our City's ills and problems, is in his assumption about fixing our City government by converting from at-large to district elections for councilpersons, and emasculating the city manager [woops, pardon the sex change] in favor of an executive mayor. I fail to see how rearranging the desk chairs on this vehicle can solve our titanic problems.

Let's take a larger view. The Cincinnati-Hamilton Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area is defined by the federal government as 13 counties: five in Ohio, six in Kentucky, and two in Indiana. The basis for this definition is economic interdependence & at CMSA we compete with other areas to attract business and residents, and therefore growth and prosperity. Yet we are divided into 222 jurisdictions, including 84 townships and 138 municipalities; Cincinnati is just one of those municipalities. This patchwork quilt makes presenting any coordinated action, such as making a pitch for a business headquarters, a major problem for our region's economy.

Now comes the Cincinnati Election Reform Commission, plus Albert, with a recommendation to further balkanize our area, by forming nine Council districts. The rationale rests on the notion that neighborhood-based districts would better represent citizens of comparable social stature, economic means, and political interests; and it would make council persons more available and accountable. The proposal would create five districts with black majorities, and four with white. Let's look at those claims.

First, there is enough divisiveness in the City and on Council now, without setting socio-economic districts vying with each other for funds and programs. Instead of a unified City voice, we could produce a cacophony of parochial noise, depending on the

issue. And we need to improve the relationships between socio-economic classes, not divide into black and white districts.

Second, Council persons need to be accountable for the management policies and prosperity of the whole City, not just the parochial pot-hole problems of one neighborhood in their district. Further, it would fix district boundary lines and lead to major realignment problems, as neighborhoods change and districts change their demographic character over time.

Third, with a reorganization of how we now elect the "stronger mayor" only a year or so in place, we need to give it time to prove itself before we claim there is an organizational problem that needs fixing. The black/white ratio on Council now is representative of the ethnic proportions of the citizens. Do we really have a problem of organization? Or is any current dysfunction of Council one of their brazen personalities and their narrow, self-serving political interests? And if the dysfunction comes from media grandstanding and self-promotion, it seems to me that could only get worse if council person were accountable only to a district.

If the City has problems, and it does, let's not divide into nine districts and compete with each other. Let's emphasize our strengths, like –

- Our arts community: a first class Art Museum, a world class Symphony, a Pops orchestra whose CD's outsell the Boston Pops, a Contemporary Arts building in the city center that is internationally acclaimed, our unique public School for the Creative and Performing Arts;
- Medical research at both University and Children's hospital which wins increasing and high grants from the NIH which are way above most research institutions;
- A tradition of volunteerism and civic involvement by the business community that is the envy of other metropolitan areas.

Let's work in our City for mutual understanding and improved relationships between our factions. And let's work for better cooperation toward common goals in our CMSA.
