



Over the wall

Ballot fool you? • Don't be bested by a tricky piece of paper; there's a chance to correct your mistake

By JIM PETERS

I is a ignorant voter. Somehow, though, I guess I should feel proud. They used to chase many non-white voters away by giving them literacy tests and charging them a poll tax. Now voting is open to all—even us dumb whites. This past weekend in College Station, there were some important municipal and school district elections. One proposition asked whether voters wanted to change to a ward system for elections or stay with the at-large method we have now. It was an easy decision, or so it seemed. The ward system would be an ill-conceived disaster for a town the size of College Station. It smacks of big cities and their corrupt ward politics. The continual redistricting problem would likely end up as a partisan political tool. Good representation would suffer. Ten of the twenty-two school board and council candidates this year resided in Precinct 8, one of six in the city. Four of the seven members of the new council live in Pre-

cinct 24. If they wanted to run for the council again after their terms expire several would have to move to another ward to do so. Either an experienced councilman or his home would necessarily be lost—it's fairly obvious which one would. As advocates of the ward system noted, a student on the council would be assured when the campus became a ward. Quite an undeserving reward, considering that not quite eight per cent of those registered on campus voted in Saturday's municipal elections. Anyway, I was dead solid against the ward system. Six of the seven councilmen and nine of the eleven council candidates also refused to support it. The only councilman who favored it said he was doing so because it would guarantee that students would never "take over" the council. A random city-wide survey conducted by council candidate Jim Crawley indicated that 75 per cent were opposed to the ward system. The Charter Revision Committee, which recommended that the ward system be placed on the ballot,

didn't even support it. Most committee members favored a combination ward and at-large system, but the ward proposal was submitted to the voters, several members said, because "it was sure to lose and that way we can come up with a better system next year." It was to be a sacrificial lamb, but it backfired. Local newspapers wrote stories on the proposal and urged in editorials that it be defeated. I even joined in and wrote a couple of editorials against it. Yep, I had done my duty educating. The only thing left to do was to exercise my individual right and vote. I figured it would be easy enough. After all, there were only two choices, "for," and "against." The first clause simply said: "The Mayor and other members of the City Council shall be elected from the city at-large." The rest of the proposition was a long discourse on how the ward system would work, 200-plus rambling words which I had read time and time again. Yep, that first sentence said enough; that's what I want. I'll just take that do-

Jimmy and punch that "for" box on the ballot. Done. After the polls closed, I went to Election Central in Bryan to watch the returns come in. When the final vote on the charter revision proposition came in, and it was determined that the ward system had squeaked into our electoral process by 29 votes, most candidates and poll-watchers were shocked. One dumbfounded city official attributed its surprising passage to voter confusion over the ballot. He said he had read it several times in advance to figure it out. When I checked the ballot to see what he meant it struck me—I too had voted for the ward system. There, buried in the fourth line, was the important line: "Be amended and repealed so as to hereafter read..." Damn, pass me the literacy exam. Of the 3,067 persons who voted in the city elections, only 2,351 actually voted on the referendum. Apparently, the others were either confused by the proposition or overlooked it.

Later, in loosely canvassing other at-large "supporters," some sheepishly admitted similar errors. The daughter of Mayor-elect Larry Bravenec said both she and her husband had erroneously voted for the ward system. If only 15 such misunderstandings had been reversed, the outcome similarly would have been reversed. And I was one of them. Justice is blind, but also deaf...and dumb. A committee has been established by the City Council to study the recent city charter referendum. If you voted on the proposition and erred in your choice because of confusion over the ballot, The Battalion would appreciate your filling out the sample ballot (shown at right), circling your corrected vote. Bring your completed ballot to The Battalion office, or mail to: City Editor, The Battalion, Reed McDonald Bldg., Campus. Results of this straw poll will be turned over to the special council committee.

COLLEGE STATION, TEXAS, MUNICIPAL ELECTION
COLLEGE STATION, TEXAS—APRIL 3, 1976

PROPOSITION 1

Article III, Section 18-(a) which presently reads as follows: "(a) The Mayor and other members of the City Council shall be elected from the city at large." Be amended and repealed so as to hereafter read: "(a) The Mayor, who may reside anywhere within the City Limits of College Station, shall be elected at large by a plurality vote. The City shall be divided into six council districts and the qualified voters of each council district shall elect, by a plurality vote, a Councilman who must reside within the council district from which he is elected and must have resided within the district for a period of at least 90 days prior to the date of the election. The City Council shall, after each Federal Decennial Census or at such other time as the City Council may decide, after a public hearing, make alterations in the council districts as are necessary. Each of the six council districts shall be composed of approximately equal numbers of persons as far as practical and reasonable and justification must be shown for the variance between council districts. This charter provision shall be put into effect as of the date set for the general municipal election in 1977 wherein Councilmen from district 1, district 3 and district 5 shall be elected to fill the vacancy in place 1, place 3 and place 5; and as of the date set for the general municipal election in 1978 wherein a Mayor shall be elected and Councilmen from district 2, district 4 and district 6 shall be elected to fill the vacancy in place 2, place 4 and place 6."

FOR 30
AGAINST 31

NAME

ADDRESS

VOTER REGISTRATION NUMBER

The Battalion

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