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Residents urged to attend Monday meeting on single member districts

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To The Editor:

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As many of you know, I have been an outspoken advocate for single member districts for the Lee County Commission. Recently, Commissioner Bob Janes has had a change of heart and agreed that the public should be allowed to vote their conscience on this issue, joining Commissioners Brian Bigelow and Frank Mann in their unwavering support of putting this issue before the voters.

On Monday, Jan. 11 at 1:30 p.m., the Board will have a Management and Planning meeting during which this topic will discussed, among other items. No public comment is allowed at the M&P meetings, however, silent attendance in support of this issue would certainly be helpful in convincing the remainder of the Board that this is important to the citizens of Lee County.

The following is a quick overview of the reasons for my support of single-member districts:

At-large voting (the current system) was arguably created in Lee County in the late-1950s specifically to discourage minority representation. In fact, through out Florida today, counties which are at-large have 1.1 percent minority board representation. Contrast this with single-member counties, which have 22.3 percent minority board representation; representation which mirrors the actual ethnic mix of the respective counties.

Of the 30 contested races within Lee County since 1980, 12 times the winner of the home district lost the race overall. In other words, nearly 50 percent of the time, the person whom the district chooses is not the final winner.

Considering all of the public comment during the 2008 Charter Review regarding districting styles, 90 percent spoke in support of single-member districts

To wit, at-large districts are structurally unfair in a variety of ways. In addition, the public was given a chance to speak on the issue and demonstrated overwhelming support for placing this issue on the ballot.

Assuming the Board agrees to move forward on Monday, the matter will then be heard in a formal public hearing in the not too distant future. I encourage everyone to attend as often as possible and demonstrate your support.

Matt Caldwell

Lehigh Acres

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