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### **Hometown Democracy: Logistical nightmare in the making**

By Stanley B. Price

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With the recent favorable ruling by the Florida Supreme Court clearing the way for a ballot initiative, the Florida secretary of state has certified the proposed Hometown Democracy amendment for the November 2010 ballot.

Hometown Democracy is a proposed constitutional amendment that would require the electorate of each county and municipality within the state to vote upon, via a referendum, all proposed changes to their land use plans. If Hometown Democracy is passed by voters, it would require that tens of thousands of local land-use changes be decided by referendum, costing taxpayers millions of dollars.

More importantly, it will force voters to review a series of complex proposals to the local governments' capital improvement plans, as well as myriad other proposed amendments.

One can only imagine the time it would take to stand in the ballot booth and review several thousand individual amendments to a capital improvement plan, such as roadway improvements, purchases and additions to existing government buildings, traffic signalization, purchase of municipal vehicles, adding park lands, providing additional facilities to existing municipal recreational facilities, as well as a series of other public expenditures. It is a logistical nightmare.

To fully understand the impact Hometown Democracy would have on just the mechanical act of voting, it is not difficult to envision a Miami-Dade County ballot that may exceed several hundred pages translated into English, Spanish and Creole. It would take well over an hour or more to vote.

Compound this with a heavy voter turnout, the end product of Hometown Democracy, and this amendment would result in frustration and eventual apathy for those wishing to exercise their constitutional right and duty to cast a ballot.

In addition to the logistical difficulties imposed on voters, it is important to note that the process enumerated in the Florida Statutes presently mandates a one-year governmental review process to review, analyze and make recommendations on these complex issues. This voluminous analysis is conducted by the professional staffs of local and county governments, regional planning boards and the state Department of Community Affairs. The average voter, to be fully informed of the issues, would be required to review this documentation, which is sometimes in excess of several thousand pages.

The fundamental issue is whether Hometown Democracy actually furthers the goals and objectives of democracy or whether it fosters voter frustration with the electoral process. The state in recent years has tried to encourage greater voter turnout by initiating several procedures, such as early voting and easier regulations for absentee ballots. Hometown Democracy does not reflect this intent.

Land-use issues are best left to the legislative process, which has sufficient safeguards to ensure due process. If one feels aggrieved by an adverse determination, one is left with the right to cast his vote against his representative.

This is the kind of democracy that has worked for our republic for more than 200 years. Hometown Democracy is the antithesis of our democratic goal.

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