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Office of Mayor
Christopher M. Taylor

To Jacqueline Beaudry, Clerk of the City of Ann Arbor:

Pursuant to my authority under Charter Section 4.5, I disapprove and veto “Resolution to Order Election, Approve Charter Ann Arbor City Charter Sections to Establish Non-Partisan Nomination and Election for the Offices of Mayor and Council and Determine Ballot Language for this Amendment”, R-19-325.

If incorporated into our Charter, the language of R-19-325 would create elections without party affiliation and thereby put an artificial barrier between Ann Arbor voters and critical information about candidate values and priorities. Voters have a right to know where candidates stand. Voters have a right to know more about a candidate, not less.

A candidate’s affiliation as a Republican or Democrat conveys clear information regarding a person’s value set – their vision of America as an inclusive, pluralistic society that recognizes both the inspirational and shameful elements of our national history, celebrates the progress we have made, and commits to the work remaining; their support of government action to achieve the common good and build our most basic infrastructure; their acceptance of the fact that health care is a right; their defense of the right of women to bodily autonomy, equal pay, and freedom from harassment; their defense of the union movement and worker rights to collective bargaining; and their commitment to protect and defend our environment and climate on the basis of science.

Some who support non-partisan elections claim that our form of local government is unfair to Ann Arbor Republicans and that it prevents them from running for office and participating in government. Nothing in our system prevents these folks from running or, if elected, serving. Republicans do not run for office in Ann Arbor because the values of the modern Republican party are inconsistent with the values of the vast majority Ann Arborites. They do not run because they will not win. The only way for someone who adheres to the policies and principles of the national Republican Party to successfully run for office in Ann Arbor would be for that person to actively conceal their affiliation, their values, from the voters – a task made far easier by this resolution.

Some suggest that there’s no partisan way to fix the roads, no connection between party identity and the local services that we provide. If you think that there is not connection between party and local issues consider this – would a Republican-led City Council:

- Support the existence and empowerment of our Human Rights Commission
- Support the existence and empowerment of our Independent Police Community Oversight Commission
- Support the existence of Ann Arbor's ambitious Climate Action Plan
- Support the \$880K/year to effect the goals of our Climate Action Plan
- Support \$1.2M/year of direct human services funding for A2's neediest
- Support additional taxes for the purpose of sidewalk improvements
- Support rigorous compliance with our Prevailing Wage Ordinance
- Support the City's cooperation with municipal unions after "Right to Work"
- Support the City's commitment to devote \$880K/year to build affordable housing
- Support the implementation of Vision Zero (no pedestrian fatalities) and Complete Streets (Cycle-Pedestrian-Auto Safety) principles in all road re-design
- Support the City's operation of hundreds of units of public housing
- Support the spending of millions of dollars to ensure that Ann Arbor's public housing is in good repair, energy efficient, and safe
- Support spending millions to tend and revitalize street trees and our urban forest
- Support Ann Arbor's successful efforts to build a 100% score on the Human Rights Campaign's LGBTQ+ Municipal Equity Index
- Support local bans of coal tar and phosphorus to protect the Huron River
- Support limited use of road salt (95% sand / 5% salt) to protect the Huron River
- Support Ann Arbor's refusal to cooperate with ICE detainer requests

No, it would not. I could go on.

Let's talk also about the roads. No one who has followed Governor Whitmer's unrelenting efforts to Fix the Damn Roads, her fight with our Republican State Legislature, can have any illusions about the Republican way to fill a pothole – delay; no new taxes; robbing Peter to pay Paul; borrowing, borrowing, and borrowing.

Some maintain too that no matter the harms that would result from removing party identification from the ballot, I should allow R-19-325 to proceed to a popular vote anyway. This line of argument is not persuasive because it proves too much. We have a representative form of government for a reason. Surely not every question that could go to the voters, must go to the voters. Surely it is not a crime against democracy to vote against putting some measure or another on the ballot. By way of example two members of the current Council majority voted against putting four-year terms on the ballot in 2016. Were they 'undemocratic' did they 'distrust the voters'? Of course not. They viewed the proposal as unwise and voted accordingly.

Stepping back for a moment, I want to address the suggestion from several Councilmembers that exercising a mayoral veto is itself undemocratic. We have a representative system of government of checks and balances. One of these checks in our system is the authority given to the Mayor to disapprove select decisions of Council, subject to Council override. Where I believe that Council has made a substantial error and I have the ability to counterbalance that error, it is proper for me to do so. This is an authority exercised by Mayors before me; it will be exercised by Mayors after me.

Our form of local government is imperfect – one Mayor, ten Councilmembers, five pie-shaped Wards, a divided downtown and diluted students, elections in November that are not often competitive. I am open to a thoughtful, community conversation about how we might improve. Everyone in Ann Arbor wants a political system in which candidates and elected officials come together to effect the Common Good. We all sense a degradation in contemporary politics, but R-19-325 will do nothing to promote more reasonable and rational governance.

The proposed change would, in my view, create a real and substantial harm by preventing the inclusion of vital candidate information on the ballot. This crucial omission would reduce the ability of Ann Arbor voters to make an informed choice and make it more difficult to ensure that they are represented by officials who reflect and share their values and priorities.

For the foregoing reasons, I disapprove and veto R-19-325.

Sincerely,



Christopher Taylor
Mayor of the City of Ann Arbor

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