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Oct 19, 2007

Voter finds new system frustrating

By [Harrison Metzger](#)

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Bill Modlin wasn't happy with his first experience with the new "instant runoff" voting when he cast his ballot for Hendersonville City Council on Thursday. When he saw the same five candidates' names appear on the screen after he had already chosen two, "I thought I was going to turn around and see Rod Serling standing there with his cigarette in his hand welcoming me to the Twilight Zone," he said. "I've been voting since I was 18. I've never seen anything like this before," said the 49-year-old Hyman Heights resident. "It is bizarre." Elections officials say the system isn't that complicated and added that they have made extra efforts to explain it to voters. In the Hendersonville City Council race, five candidates are running for two seats. Instant runoff voting allows voters to cast ballots for the two candidates of their choice on one screen of the electronic voting machine. Another screen then allows them to vote for their third, fourth and fifth choices. The intent is to eliminate the possible need for a runoff election. Modlin said he feels the new system was confusing and could cause some voters to invalidate their ballots. "It doesn't make any sense to me, and I can guarantee you because of the way they have it set up there are people in this town that are going to lose their vote," he said. "You would think that all the hoopla that has been made over voting glitches both intentional and unintentional that somebody would have looked at this and said you know, this is not such a bright idea. But they let it through." Handling discontent North Carolina is testing instant runoff voting in this year's municipal races. Elections Director Beverly Cunningham said Thursday afternoon she had only gotten one complaint, apparently from Modlin, among 144 voters (though not all of those were city voters). "I have been out there most of the day. He is the only one I have heard that had any concerns about," she said. Modlin thought that if voters picked their top choice again on the instant runoff voting screen, it would invalidate their initial vote. Cunningham said that is not the case. If you make a mistake and vote for your top choice again on the instant runoff screen, that vote would be canceled, but not the initial vote, she said. "It is pretty simple -- you vote for two and then you rank the remaining three," she said. Residents can avoid instant runoff voting altogether by voting only for their top one or two choices. After making their choices, voters review their choices on another screen before finalizing their ballots. "It is going to show you what you selected so you still have an opportunity to change it on the review page," Cunningham said. "It is practically impossible to vote for the same people twice if you read the instructions and read your review screen." Even if voters choose just one candidate, the ballot

will be valid, she said. Modlin, a truck driver who has lived 11 years in Hyman Heights with his wife, Elizabeth, came to the elections office to cast an absentee ballot Thursday. He said he started to vote for the same candidate twice, suspected he was making a mistake, and asked about it. He said the elections worker he spoke with didn't seem pleased when he questioned the system. "She acted almost like she was offended, like 'you idiot, can't you figure it out?'" he said. Cunningham said elections officials have held several educational programs for residents on instant runoff voting. They had a booth at the N.C. Apple Festival for three days and presented programs at Carolina Village, Lake Pointe Landing and the Oaks. They visited Hendersonville City Hall on a Friday afternoon when many residents come in to pay water bills, and have a machine set up where voters can try out the process. City residents were also sent a copy of voting information and a sample ballot with their water bills, she said. Modlin said the system is not as simple as elections workers make it out to be. "I call it instant confusion," he said.

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