

Take care, or you may end up with 'King Ralph'

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The phrase "too much of a good thing" is really an oxymoron. After all, if it's good, how can you have too much?

But I began thinking about the phrase in the context of the April municipal elections. This year, Naperville residents have a plethora of candidates from which to choose. Eight are vying for seats on Naperville's park board. In school District 203, there are 10 candidates, and in District 204 there are a lucky 13.

And then there's City Council. A total of 16 candidates are running. There are 13 seeking four-year terms and three competing for a two year term. According to City Clerk Pam LaFeber, this is the highest number of candidates in at least the past 28 years. She researched the number of candidates for me back to 1981, and the only time the field of candidates reached the double digits was in 1995, when 12 residents ran for office. That year also featured a mayoral election.

And then there's the local Democratic Party. Perhaps still riding the "Obama effect," the Democrats have nearly full slates in several of the township elections.

While many have praised the number of candidates as showing the true Naperville spirit of public service and volunteerism, is it really a good thing?

"It's definitely not a good thing for the candidates," said Stephen Maynard Caliendo, associate professor of political science at North Central College. "They have to find ways to make themselves stand out in a crowded field."

Because this is what is called a "low-stimulus election" -- due to no Congressional races -- Caliendo said candidates have to work harder and with less campaign money.

"Signs help with name recognition, but not much information," he said.

That means in many cases, voters have to seek out the information instead of the information coming to them. Internet access makes it easier for candidates to get the word out and for you to hear it.

"In general, more choice is always better," Caliendo said. "One thing we hear from voters is, 'We don't like anybody.'"

When struggling to make a decision, you often take more time to research, review and contemplate the outcome. But sometimes, when faced with too many choices, you can end up making a hasty decision.

For instance, as a teenager, I went with a few friends to Blockbuster to pick out a movie for our video night. Sadly, we were in the store for more than an hour trying to find a film we all agreed upon. Either someone had already seen the movie, or objected to the genre.

In the end, we ended up selecting "King Ralph."

Selecting candidates -- and in most instances residents will have literally dozens on their ballots -- has many more consequences though than a 90-minute movie.

So Naperville voters, I urge you to learn about your candidates -- for every election. Read

the news articles. Attend the forums. Ask questions.

Because -- and I say this with all due respect to John Goodman -- you don't want to end up with King Ralph.