*Argument 6*

*The following appeared in a letter to the editor of the Clearview newspaper.*

*"In the next mayoral election, residents of Clearview should vote for Ann Green, who is a*

*member of the Good Earth Coalition, rather than for Frank Braun, a member of the Clearview*

*town council, because the current members are not protecting our environment. For example,*

*during the past year the number of factories in Clearview has doubled, air pollution levels have*

*increased, and the local hospital has treated 25 percent more patients with respiratory*

*illnesses. If we elect Ann Green, the environmental problems in Clearview will certainly be*

*solved."*

This editorial recommends that Clearview residents vote to replace city-council member

Frank Braun with Ann Green, a member of the Good Earth Coalition. To support this

recommendation the editorial cites a significant increase during the last year in the number of

Clearview factories and in the number of Clearview hospital patients treated for respiratory

illnesses. On the basis of this evidence the author infers that the current council members are

not protecting the city's environment and that electing Green will solve the city's environmental

problems. This argument is logically flawed in several critical respects.

To begin with, the argument unfairly assumes that last year's increase in the number of

factories was due to the city council's decisions--rather than to some other phenomenon-and

that this increase poses environmental problems for Clearview. The editorial provides no

evidence to substantiate these assumptions. Lacking such evidence it is entirely possible that

the council actually opposed the increase but lacked adequate authority to prevent it, or that

the new factories do not in fact harm Clearview's environment.

The argument also assumes unfairly that last year's increase in the number of patients

reporting respiratory problems indicates worsening environmental problems in Clear view.

Perhaps the actual incidence of such health problems has not increased, and the reported

increase is due to increasing awareness among Clearview residents of respiratory problems.

Even if the incidence of respiratory problems has in fact increased, the increase might due to

an influx of people with pre-existing such problems, or to more effective cigarette marketing.

Since the editorial fails to rule out these and other possible explanations for the increase, I

cannot accept any conclusions about Clearview's environment let alone about who voters

should elect to city council based on last year's hospital records.

Even if the two cited increases do indicate a worsening of Clearview's environment due to

the city council's decisions, the argument rests on the further assumption that Braun was a

factor in those decisions. But, since the editorial provides no evidence to substantiate this

assumption it is equally possible that Braun actually opposed the decisions that were

responsible for these increases. Thus without better evidence that Braun contributed to key

decisions adversely effecting Clearview's environment the editorial remains unconvincing.

Even assuming that Braun was at least partially responsible for the two increases, and that

those increases indicate a worsening environment, the editorial provides no clear evidence

that Green would be effective in reversing that trend let alone more effective than Braun. The

mere fact that Green is a member of the Good Earth Coalition hardly suffices to prove her

willingness and ability to help solve Clearview's environmental problems, at least not without

more information about that coalition and Green's involvement in it.

Finally, even if Green would in fact be more effective than Braun in solving Clearview's

environmental problems, the author provides no firm evidence that electing Green is

necessary to solve those problems, or that electing Green would suffice. Perhaps another

candidate, or another course of action, would be more effective. Even if Green does everything

in her power as city-council member to solve these problems, perhaps additional

measures--such as replacing other council members, state legislators, or even the state's

governor--would also be required in order to achieve Clearview's environmental objectives.

In sum, the editorial's author cannot justify his or her voting recommendation on the basis of

the scant evidence provided in the editorial. To bolster the recommendation the author must

provide better evidence that (1) Clearview has environmental problems to begin with, (2)

Green would be more effective than either Braun or any other candidate in solving those

problems, and (3) electing Green would suffice to solve those problems. To better assess the

argument I would need to know the scope of the city council's authority respecting

environmental decisions. I would also need to know Braun's voting record on environmental

issues, Green's experience and position on those issues, and the voters' other

choices--besides Green and Braun.