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HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

#####BEGIN HED#####

1 A fully democratic process

#####END HED#####

#####BEGIN SUBHED#####

2 When Vermont Town Meetings speak, the nation and the
3 world listens. But in Newfane, some want to restrict resolutions
4 to issues within our town boundaries, removing the civic power
5 and influence that we might have on our world.

#####END SUBHED#####

6 TEXT BODY:

#####BEGIN TEXT#####

7 CENSORSHIP IS COMING into vogue thanks to the tender
8 feelings of the snowflake Trump administration.
9 To maintain their fiction of white supremacy, MAGA
10 word warriors are busy excising inconvenient words, phrases,
11 and facts from government websites and documents. No noble

12 deed or achievement, if performed by a non-white person, is
13 immune from being declared “fake” or a concoction of the
14 dreaded “DEI.” Questions that may cause some discomfort to a
15 white person are no longer welcome in MAGA-land.

16 Now that same regressive mindset seems to be infecting
17 some Vermonters’ attitudes about Vermont Town Meeting.

18 In Newfane, some residents has asked the Selectboard to
19 accept resolutions that pertain only to in-town affairs: no more
20 debates about a nuclear weapons freeze, growth hormones in
21 Vermont milk, illegal and ill-advised wars based on lies or, most
22 recently, speaking out against genocide in Gaza and apartheid in
23 Israel.

24 * * *

25 WHEN THESE AND other such resolutions have been
26 passed by small-town residents in tiny Vermont, they have had an
27 outsized impact on the world around us. For whatever reason,
28 when Vermont Town Meetings speak, the nation and the world
29 listens.

30 Maybe it is because the people who bring these
31 resolutions have usually done their homework and are prepared
32 to share factual information and cohesive arguments with their
33 neighbors.

34 Maybe it is because observers are impressed with the
35 sincerity of reasoning and tact with which these questions are
36 debated or how townspeople can passionately disagree on an
37 issue but still shake hands after the vote, with no personal
38 animosity or harm to town interpersonal relations.

39 Indeed, the conduct, quality of debate and decorum at
40 Newfane Town Meetings are a perfect example of what James
41 Madison, advocating for the Constitution, described in the
42 Federalist Papers as the ideal for American politicians.

43 Madison knew that good representatives would need to
44 be well-versed in the subtleties of the issues of the day, literate,
45 and open to persuasion, and they would need to put the good of
46 the nation above all other considerations in their deliberations.

47 * * *

48 THE POLITICIANS who are failing us so miserably in
49 Washington, D.C. and, to a lesser extent, in Montpelier would
50 have benefited from attending last year's Town Meeting in
51 Newfane.

52 For over two hours (after all the other town business had
53 been debated and voted upon), residents on both sides of the
54 Israeli/Palestinian question engaged in passionate, fact-sourced
55 debate.

56 And over that time period, even as opposing beliefs held
57 firm, appreciation of the value of all the arguments was
58 acknowledged, some degree of compromise was implemented,
59 and after the vote, "winners" and "losers" embraced; we
60 congratulated ourselves on a job well done, and we left Town
61 Meeting proud of our hard work and obvious caring for each
62 other that allowed us to engage in such tumultuous debate
63 without damaging our body politic.

64 But now, some residents, as well as some members of the
65 Selectboard, want to take away this important means by which
66 we can exercise the maximum possible power and influence that
67 we might have on our world.

68 They say that Town Meeting should be about only roads
69 and taxes and other matters confined within our town
70 boundaries. They imply that we the people have no right to weigh
71 in on big topics that are under the purview of the professional
72 political class, that big questions have no bearing on our town
73 governance, and that it is wrong to bring important state,
74 national, or international issues up for discussion and vote.

75 They are in essence saying that we do not merit a
76 podium, our views have no value, and we should stop trying to
77 influence politicians who are treating us and the Earth with such
78 blatant disregard.

79 If the political class had not stopped doing its proper job
80 over the past few decades, maybe we would not have to weigh in
81 on these issues.

82 If the trillion dollar wars didn't exact a significant
83 monetary toll on each one of us via federal taxes, then we
84 wouldn't have to pinch pennies to provide our children a decent
85 school that doesn't leak rain or poison them with chemicals.

86 If local values such as community, mutual respect, care
87 and empathy for our neighbors, and a genuine interest in
88 understanding our community needs were being honored by the
89 political bodies who govern us, then we wouldn't have to take a
90 moral stand to decry their misdeeds that put us in harm's way
91 and are examples of the worst that humanity has to offer.

92 * * *

93 IN ORDER TO disparage this long-standing custom of
94 citizen-generated articles on the Town Meeting warning,
95 detractors claim that it is just a few zealots who are forcing their
96 will on the town.

97 But, at least in Newfane, 5% of the voters in the town
98 must sign on to any petition for an article to be warned, a
99 significant number that reflects grassroots ground work and a
100 substantial number of citizens who see merit in the article in
101 question.

102 Getting an article warned and debating it at Town
103 Meeting is a fully democratic process from beginning to end. It
104 makes us better citizens. It requires us to connect with our
105 neighbors. It increases interest in Town Meeting, especially
106 among young people who have drifted away from the tradition
107 over the years.

108 Let's not spend all of our energy trying to stifle debate,
109 cheapening our own value as thinking persons, and digging a
110 hole that we can hide in as disastrous governmental policies
111 overwhelm our lives and our communities.

112 Let's instead put our energy into understanding the issues
113 of the day, making our case for or against propositions
114 concerning them, and proudly exercising our rights to be the best
115 citizens that we can.

116 We and Vermont deserve no less.

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#####END TEXT#####
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BIO/COATTAIL:

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#####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL#####
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117 **DAN DEWALT**, a frequent contributor to these pages and
118 one of the founders of this newspaper, writes that if he didn't love
119 his country, he "wouldn't spend so much time trying to get it to
120 live up to its purported principles."

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#####END BIO/COATTAIL#####
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LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

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#####END MAXISSUE#####
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LINKS:

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122

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VIDEO:

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#####END VIDEO#####
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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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124

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#####END LOGLINE#####
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