

—Slug:.....COMM-0854.opin.letter.a00_byrne
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—For section.....Voices/Letters from readers
—Format.....Opinions - Letters to the Editor - Special
—Dateline.....Brattleboro
—Article Number:.....43167

Notes from editor (not for publication):

Hi, Roni — “Public debate is fine for those who want or need it. For those of us who don’t, the exercise feels less like democracy and more like being beaten with socks full of nickels.” This sentence made me do a spit take of my seltzer. I *loved* your writing in this letter — I think it’s your first for The Commons, if I’m not mistaken. Welcome, and I’d love to see more from you in our pages. —All the best, Jeff

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 ‘Agenda-driven advocacy disguised as public discussion’

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2

####END SUBHED####

3 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

4 Based on my own experiences as an RTM member of
5 some years, I find that any assertions attempting to paint
6 Representative Town Meeting as some noble enterprise wherein
7 members enter into deliberations without agendas to be
8 inaccurate and perhaps a tad disingenuous.

9 Consider the upcoming/recent District 8 and District 9
10 informational sessions.

11 In District 8, a meeting will feature keynote speakers
12 Nell Mayo and Isaac Evans-Frantz, (two of the candidates for the
13 Selectboard). Six other Selectboard candidates were not invited.
14 Six. That is not an oversight — it is gatekeeping.

15 When a publicly branded “informational session”
16 spotlights only two candidates while excluding the rest, it ceases
17 to be informational and becomes promotional. This is not neutral
18 civic engagement; it is agenda-driven advocacy disguised as
19 public discussion.

20 In District 9, the meeting organizers are openly leading
21 efforts to “save RTM,” and prior meetings have been dominated
22 by a single narrow viewpoint. When the organizers of a
23 discussion are simultaneously campaigning for a specific
24 outcome and opposing voices are marginalized or absent, the
25 process is not deliberative — it is curated.

26 These examples expose a deeper structural problem.
27 RTM concentrates power into a small subset of the citizenry who
28 shape agendas, frame debates, control platforms, and influence
29 outcomes before the broader public ever has a meaningful
30 chance to engage.

31 The promise of RTM is thoughtful, balanced
32 representation. The reality is selective amplification and political
33 maneuvering.

34 If RTM cannot even conduct neutral informational
35 sessions during an election cycle, how can it credibly claim to
36 represent the full diversity of town opinion?

37 This is precisely why RTM should be discontinued. A
38 system that allows insiders to control access, elevate preferred
39 candidates, and narrow debate undermines transparency and
40 public trust.

41 Our town deserves a governance structure that is open,
42 inclusive, and directly accountable — not one that filters

43 participation through a small body vulnerable to organized
44 agendas.

45 The open Town Meeting (OTM) format does not really
46 offer a workable solution to the problem of concentrating power
47 into a small pool of voters, either. Why? Because all of the 9,000
48 eligible voters in this town have a right to participate in decision-
49 making about our collective future without the burden of being
50 required to sit in a room for the all-day discussions, as the
51 proponents of OTM would have us do.

52 Public debate is fine for those who want or need it. For
53 those of us who don't, the exercise feels less like democracy and
54 more like being beaten with socks full of nickels.

55 This town is full of intelligent and informed folks who are
56 perfectly capable of separating fact from opinion and making
57 sensible decisions in the voting booth privately and without
58 coercion.

59 Vote yes on Article 2 to end RTM. Vote yes on Article 3
60 to replace RTM with secret ballot; aka "one person, one vote."
61 Vote no on Article 4 to replace RTM with OTM.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

62 The writer represents District 9 as a member of
63 Brattleboro's Representative Town Meeting.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

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####END MAXISSUE####

LINKS:

####BEGIN LINKS####

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###END LINKS###

VIDEO:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

###BEGIN LOGLINE###

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###END LOGLINE###