

## UNCLE SAM WANTS YOU TO KEEP TOWN MEETING

I oppose adopting SB2 in Mason. For well over two hundred years we have thrived under governance by town meeting. Uncle Sam, when he lived in Mason, enjoyed town meeting governance. Unless you are a selectperson or a board member, town meeting is your best opportunity to participate in direct, non-representative democracy.

“When, in some obscure country town, the farmers come together to a special town-meeting, to express their opinion on some subject which is vexing the land, that, I think, is the true Congress, and the most respectable one that is ever assembled in the United States.” Henry David Thoreau, *Slavery in Massachusetts* (1854).

When one of our citizens stands up in Town Meeting, you know something important is about to be said. You learn the thoughts and feelings of a concerned citizen who has thought deeply and cares about Mason. Maybe you are moved to agree or perhaps vehemently disagree, but all the voters present benefit from the discourse. Most importantly, you can respond if you choose, and share your own passionate feelings about the issues with the folks that will, in a few short minutes, vote on that issue.

While SB2 provides for a deliberative session, it is statistically proven that deliberative sessions have very poor attendance compared to town meetings. Many people do not see the value of attending the deliberative session because they will have the opportunity to vote on the same issues a month later. But there is one group of people that will always attend the deliberative session: those with a *special interest* in the election. And, because deliberative sessions commonly suffer poor attendance, those special interest groups can, by mustering a few of their number, can take control of the deliberative session to modify the warrant to suit their personal or corporate wants. So, when you step into the voting booth a month later, you are voting on articles that, without your knowledge, may have been designed or modified to meet the needs of a special interest group.

Warrant articles can be modified by motion at town meeting. But it happens before the watchful scrutiny of all and the same people who will vote on the article. There is much less opportunity for a small group to manipulate the warrant in a true town meeting, where any special interests would be exposed for all the voters to see.

We have a small town. The population of Mason in 1850 was 1,626 people. The population today is estimated to reach 1,570 by the year 2030. The town meeting form of government has always worked for our town at the size it was and is now.

I understand that there are folks who fear public speaking and are loathe to speak their mind at town meeting. However, disagreement in politics is impossible to avoid. Thomas Jefferson said "An association of men who will not quarrel with one another is a thing which has never yet existed, from the greatest confederacy of nations down to a town meeting or a vestry." If, after hearing the discourse on a warrant article at town meeting, a citizen fears recrimination if their vote is public, a secret ballot can be requested.

Let us continue to have meaningful debate and argument in Mason. Keep town meeting--it was good enough for UNCLE SAM and it is good enough for us. Vote against SB2.

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