

# north shore news

## LETTER: Democracy relies on citizen participation

North Shore News

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**Dear Editor:**

The City of North Vancouver's proposal to eliminate public input was equally preposterous as the approval of the amendment that punishes the public's input and behavior based on the staff's or council's perception and that allows them to classify it as bullying and harassment.

Democracy is the foundation of our country's values. The active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life is what make us different from totalitarian regimes. The key role of citizens in a democracy is to participate in public life, without that input, democracy is transformed into dictatorship.

Citizens have the obligation to become informed about public issues, to watch carefully how their political leaders and representatives use their powers, and to express their own opinions and interests.

This participation involves also debating public issues, attending community meetings, petitioning the government and even protesting.

Democracy depends on citizen participation. No public input because of government's silencing equals totalitarianism, and granted, that participation must be peaceful, respectful of the law and tolerant of the different views of other groups and individuals.

Eliminating this input because it could seem inappropriate is an insult to our basic freedom rights.

Every citizen has basic rights that the state cannot take away from them and these rights are guaranteed under international law.

You have the right to have your own beliefs, and to say and write what you think and no one can tell you what you must think, believe and say or not say. Nobody.

For democracy to work, citizens must not only participate and exercise their rights. They must also observe certain principles and rules of democratic conduct and must respect the law and reject violence. This only works if this rule is both sided.

Nothing ever justifies using violence against somebody that has something to say just because you disagree with them. Silencing people from what they want to say is a form of violence.

In my view, people should question the decisions of the government and when you express your opinions, you should also listen to the views of other people, even people you disagree with.

Everyone has a right to be heard and if one group is excluded and fails to be heard, this turns against democracy and ends in anger and frustration. We all know where this road leads to.

Democracy requires compromise.

As Aung San Suu Kyi (1991), Nobel Peace Prize said: "It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it."

**Elias Merkins**

**West Vancouver**

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