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### Historical but Obsolete Institution

Over recent years, our town meetings have amply demonstrated why this institution is obsolete and needs to evolve with the times. Typically, a small, well-organized cadre has attended specifically to swing key votes in favor of its gain, against the welfare of the public. The urgent need for change is clear.

Why is it that in a town of so many thousands of potential voters, a special interest coterie of a couple of hundred can make such a difference? That's of course because of the time constraints that preclude many voters from attending the meetings. Immediately eliminated are safety and emergency workers as well as nurses and others on critical night shifts. Similarly excluded are the many parents who do not have ready childcare available, least of all for four consecutive evenings. Also consider the situation of the typical worker in the modern economy: as likely as not, his/her workday may last ten hours or more. Few jobs, except perhaps some government sinecures, function on the classic nine-to-five basis these days. And no, taking vacation time is not the answer, because such time is likely limited to two weeks per year and is subject to the far greater priorities of family events or just plain recovery from arduous or enervating toil. Some years the town meetings have even dragged to as many as four days!

This de facto disenfranchisement, no doubt marginally unconstitutional, has been noted repeatedly in the town newspaper. There has even been a courageous editorial calling for the end or modification of town meetings (which, unsurprisingly, was followed by passionate defense from the town moderator and special interests with the most to lose).

Indeed, poll results have shown that 62% of respondents were for modification toward electronic participation or absentee balloting (additionally, some favored outright abolishment). In addition to restoring voting opportunity to thousands, electronic or absentee voting would adhere to that hallowed hallmark of democracy, the secret ballot, whose current lack is another regrettable deficiency of the town meeting concept.

Yes, the days when the citizenry could fit into Farmer Jones' barn and, after some hearty choruses of E-I-E-I-O, within an hour finish voting on the year's critical issues -- say, a new horse hitching post -- are long gone. It's time for our government procedures to join the 21st century.