One of the best things that the last Davenport City Council did was to begin televising both committee and council meetings on tape. Many people who would not normally be able to personally attend these meetings could now keep current on issues by watching them on TV.

The “public with business” portion at the end of the meetings is of equal importance. It’s during that period of time when *any* citizen may address a whole committee or the entire council on any matter they wish. This is their opportunity to have everyone in the same room without having to make 10 separate phone calls to aldermen.

To TV viewers at home, this is also an important portion of the meeting. It allows them the opportunity to see and hear other “just plain citizens” expressing their opinions and concerns. It gives the viewer a chance to know who their fellow Davenporters are and what they are thinking.

Apparently, an informal poll was taken during the Davenport City Council goal-setting session this past week concerning discontinuing the taping and thus the broadcasting of the public forum at the end of meetings. The mayor and seven aldermen supported this plan at the straw poll. The only two members who disagreed were Mr. Hean and Mr. Ambrose. Perhaps they are the only two of our city council who value open government and free speech.

If the aldermen want respect from those who elected them, who pay their salaries, and whom they have pledged to serve, then they need to respect us, the citizenry. They need to provide a true “open forum” for all. They need to listen respectfully and quiety and consider what has been said. What do these council members fear from the public that makes them want to suppress words?

Some aldermen have said that it is an embarrassment. Well, we watched our mayor and one alderman make fools of themselves, and we survived. Perhaps some people show up and speak too often, but we can survive. Or there might be those persons who we think are being inappropriate or confused or just plain mean and wrong. Each is entitled to be heard both in council chambers and by the public at-large via TV.

Some councilmen imply that meetings aren’t run well. If that is true, why penalize the public for a council procedural problem? Perhaps, to paraphrase Pogo, the council has met the enemy, and it is them.

Some councilmen see this forum as presenting a negative image of our city. Maybe instead it is a positive in that we are providing an opportunity for all of our citizens to be heard. What a refreshing thought: We in Davenport can exhibit true freedom that so many of our citizens fought and died to preserve.

Patricia A. Egly,
Davenport

Editor’s note: *Aldermen George Nickolas and Roland Caldwell joined Hean and Ambrose in opposing the measure at the January 16 Committee of the Whole meeting.*