



## Crossing street for democracy

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Isn't it ironic?

A citizen of Calgary will cross an ocean and fight through enemy lines for democracy, yet many will not cross the street to vote or get engaged with the municipal government.

Calgary has a proud history of defending democracy.

In 1910, the King's Own Calgary Rifles was formed and housed at Mewata Armoury.

Its most famous soldier, Pte. John George Pattison, earned the Victoria Cross, Britain and the Commonwealth's "highest and most prestigious award for gallantry under enemy fire" at Vimy Ridge.

Pattison's biographer records the details: "On April 10, 1917, the advance of Canadian troops was held up by an enemy machine-gun which was inflicting severe casualties. Pattison, with utter disregard for his own safety, sprang forward and jumping from shell-hole to shell-hole, reached cover within 30 yards of the enemy gun. From this point, in the face of heavy fire, he hurled bombs killing and wounding some of the crew, then rushed forward overcoming and bayoneting the surviving five gunners. His initiative and valour undoubtedly saved the situation."

Pattison was killed in action less than six weeks later at Lens, France and is buried at La Chaudiere Military Cemetery. He was 42. His Victoria Cross is on display at the Glenbow Museum.

What a shame that, just short of a century later, Maclean's ranks Calgary as the worst city in Canada for voter turnout, with a trifling 25% of the eligible electorate showing up to cast ballots.

The poll cites the national average as 41%. Quebec City boasts a 63% turnout, closely followed by Gatineau, Quebec at 61% and Charlottetown at 60%.

Maclean's also places Calgary as dead last among 27 Canadian cities in citizen engagement. While much can be blamed on apathy and the lack of personal accountability, some think it is because city hall treats Calgarians as tenants, not citizens.

The Calgary Chamber of Commerce is a champion of open government, a noble form of democracy. It's simple. The public has a right to know what government is doing and why. Conversely, the public must be engaged and empowered to get involved in the processes of government and be consulted on key decisions.

Council meetings are where local democracy happens and the Chamber encourages improvements to better connect Calgarians with city hall:

1. Schedule council and policy committee meetings so citizens who wish to have input know when issues will be debated. Currently, interested parties have to wait their turn during a period of several hours or days.
2. Publish an easy-to-access on-line Hansard record of all council and policy committee meetings.



3. Implement a meeting monitor system to provide (nearly) real-time updates on the status of items.
4. Improve the format of council minutes to ensure each alderman's votes are recorded whether for, against, abstain or absent.
5. Shift the burden onto council to prove there is a legitimate need for secrecy before taking a meeting in-camera.
6. Implement an on-line feed to notify Calgarians when a new document or change is made to the website.
7. Use simple links, as an alternative to the cumbersome database already in-place, to provide a basic archive of all council minutes and agendas.

Calgarians still fight and die for democracy abroad. We salute Cpl. Nathan Hornburg, killed in operations in Afghanistan on Sept. 24, 2007. He is the first soldier of the King's Own to die in combat since the Second World War.

In Cpl. Hornburg's memory, Calgarians must engage and vote on the future of our community. Crossing the street will improve the quality of our democracy.