

## Forced opinions not a true reflection of society

by Mark Pavilons

Lady Bird Johnson once said that "the clash of ideas is the sound of freedom."

Democratic principles hold dear to their very core the exchange of ideas and thoughts. The public is encouraged to share, trade, discuss and debate.

Anything that curbs any of these fundamental principles hinders democracy. It limits our freedom. In our liberal-minded society, we've accepted almost every religion, ideology, orientation and idea.

Opinions are what great debates and discussions are made of.

The great orators of our past, like Plato and Socrates, relished in fulsome exchanges. A different perspective can be like a fresh breeze.

Plato laid the groundwork for philosophy and well, deep thinking.

Thinking leads to questions and questions foster discussion. It's how we learn, grow and pass on information.

I support learning as much as we can about other cultures, religions and viewpoints. It's not only fascinating, but you start to understand so much more about our fellow human beings.

There are no right or wrong answers here.

But when we're forced to act and speak in a certain way; pretend to support contrary ideologies and lobby for conflicting beliefs, our liberalism is edging closer to totalitarianism.

There's a huge difference between suggesting, recommending and imposing thoughts and ideas.

Okay, we live in a progressive society.

"You don't make progress by standing on the sidelines, whimpering and complaining. You make progress by implementing ideas," said Shirley Chisholm.

That is quite true. When concepts brew, percolate and come to fruition, we act upon them and affect change. There's no question that many of our approaches, concepts and ingrained beliefs need to change, to evolve and better reflect a more advanced, more woke society.

Racism, hatred, antisemitism, bigotry can no longer be tolerated in our society.

I suppose we hoped, once our species became enlightened, that such things would just fall by the wayside, and we would all become more tolerant, compassionate, more accepting.

I truly believe we will, eventually.

It's taking longer than many expect, and people, from the grass roots right up to the highest power brokers, want change to occur more quickly.

So, lawmakers, with input from special interest groups and a growing social conscience, brought about legislation, movements and penalties to combat such abhorrent behaviour.

But making something frowned upon or even illegal doesn't stop it. It's hard to eliminate ingrained racism and hatred unless you alter some people's DNA.

All the facts, logic, emotion and positivity in the world won't budge those cemented in the past, rooted in some archaic ignorance.

For good ideas and true innovation, you need human interaction, conflict, argument, debate. And we get that when willing partners sit at the same table and share similar goals.

People shouldn't be afraid to talk. You should listen to what other people have to say and how they base their decisions. There should be an exchange of ideas and opinions because that's how we learn.

We've heard the age-old sentiment that if you're not with us, you're against us. There are even several mentions of this in the Bible.

Of course, it's an assumption, not based on fact or logic and yet this phrase has driven our kind for thousands of years. This false dilemma is what has divided us for centuries.

This idea offered no middle ground or alternatives. It was our undoing.

So, as we rose to new intellectual heights, we created a society that not only provides middle ground, but encourages it.

Canada is one of the few countries that supports, even mandates, fairness in terms of sexual orientation, race, and religion. We have a beautiful cultural mosaic in this country, filled with ample opportunities to learn about others from around the world.

That's priceless.

And yet age-old debates continue regarding sexuality, abortion and religious ideologies. There's a constant battle between rights and privileges.

I learned, long ago, not to engage in heated debates on any of these topics. They are no-win discussions. In some ways, I believe that government moves to mandate common sense and tolerance may backfire.

The recent outcry regarding a hockey player's refusal to practice in support of gay pride is just one nugget. My first reaction was who cares? He wasn't against the idea, he just didn't want to participate. Is that not his right? There was all kinds of backlash last year when American athletes refused to stand for the national anthem, during a time of unrest. Heresy? Burn these heathens at the stake! In our society, during this time of taking new paths and creating new inroads, there has to be give and take. There has to be recognition and tolerance for all views and all standpoints. You can't achieve equality if one group or opposing view is still being ignored. Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people, according to Eleanor Roosevelt.

Let's all aspire to be great minds.