

Thank you for that nice introduction. It's nice to be here today with distinguished people like Mike McCurry – former press secretary to President Clinton. Wow, Mike – all things considered, you're looking pretty good these days. And that's really something for a guy who has spent as much time in Washington DC as you have. I've noticed that people go out there looking virile and young, and within about three years look like they've aged 10 or more. It's a real hang-up for me thinking about ever running for national office. Those beaches in Kona seem to do more for a person than too much time in the Beltway.

But I like Washington. I've been out there several times since I was elected:

- On my first trip, to the National Governor's Association, the Republicans met in one huge ballroom ... the Democrats met in a different building. Maine Governor Angus King and I held the first ever Independent Caucus on Independence Avenue.
- On my second trip, two things come to mind. One, we went dancing at the White House and I almost cut in on Mike's old boss and Mrs. Clinton – but my wife wouldn't let me. And two, I learned that it pays sometimes to be independent. You can say things that others won't say. The subject was education, and at the end of a long list of White House initiatives, Governor King spoke up and said, "Mr. President ... we can build our own schools, we can hire our own teachers, but it's your job to send special education money to the states and end this unfunded federal mandate that hurts in every building in America.
- This last trip was about agriculture. We made a lot of tracks in two days – to meet with the National Economic Advisor to the President, the Secretary of Agriculture, the U.S Trade Office, and the Canadian Ambassador. I give him credit – he kept a very straight face while I explained exactly how my favorite Toronto cigar shop ships me Cuban cigars to share with Arnold Schwarzenegger at Christmas time. The big news though, as you might have been following in the media, is about dairy reform.

You are all here interested in government and politics and this "new day."

Let's talk about federal dairy policy as just one example of why we simply need common sense to launch meaningful reforms.

Dairy is the most complicated of the complicated of agriculture policies. My head hurt.

- Eau Claire – what's THAT got to do with the price of milk? 60 years ago, before refrigerated trucks, that was the center of the dairy universe.
- Beaumont Texas – Staff checked – only Longhorns. We get 1100 miles compared with 83 to Eau Claire.

- Congress was stuck looking at Option 1-A or Option 1-B – I said why not Option C – NONE of the above. Let the free market work.
- End these “regional compacts” where six states have banded together to control prices at the expense of the rest of the country.

I said it was time for a couple of simple, fair principles to take over:

1. Our farmers need a fair, open and level playing field at home. Government should not control prices or tell farmers how to milk. If deregulation is good enough for corn or wheat, why not cows?
2. Our farmers also need a fair, open and level playing field worldwide. The trade talks in Seattle must involve farmers. We need to tell Europe and Asia and South America to open their markets. Then we can compete.

I believe in the Constitution. It affords us FREEDOMS, not limitations.

I believe in a limited, accountable role for government.

- Government should only do that which individuals cannot do for themselves.

Time and again, in my last eight months as Governor, I see elected officials try to take over responsibilities that belong to individuals.

- Government should not be raising children.
- Government should not be telling farmers what to raise.
- Government should not be driving senior citizens from their homes with bad property tax policies and ending their independent years.
- Government should not be punishing people for being successful.
- But all these things and more happen every day if somebody doesn’t say, “NO.”

Politicians don’t say “NO” very easily. If you’re worried about the next election, you tend to say “YES” more than “NO.”

- More promises than action on tax cuts and real reforms.
- No action on things that demand self-sufficiency.
- Unbalanced budgets are caused by pushing spending into the NEXT biennium
- Too many politicians measure success by how many laws they pass each year, or at least introduce. I caught a lot of flak for not introducing dozens and dozens of policy bills this past session.
- I said, THE BUDGET IS THE BUDGET. No supplemental spending.
- Return all the surplus to the taxpayers.

The media plays a huge role.

- One of my surprises is to realize how they make news, not report news.
- Priorities are wrong – I was in a Minneapolis neighborhood celebrating the turn-around they've made, and some nut threw a pie at me. Guess what led the news? The pie.

It's no surprise to me that the public is tired of politicians AND the media.

But now the citizens are awake. And we are the better for it.

I remember clearly the young guy from (Marshall?) who said, "Jesse! You are us."

I never forget that.

I am the kid who grew up in South Minneapolis and lived to write a book about it.

I am the guy who took off in a car with (\$200?) and a dream to be a wrestler and made it.

I am the young man who served his country in a war, and came back not able to have a beer, vote, or even gamble in a casino.

I am the parent of two children who I am proud to be measured by.

I am the football coach who says I will never be disappointed in my kids if they play their best, but God help them if they quit on me.

I am also the person who decided to take my turn and run for Mayor of my suburban city.

- Highest turnout ever – 20,000 people.
- The most dangerous person in Brooklyn Park.
- People coming to meetings at 11 p.m. because they saw our meetings on Cable TV.

WHY? Because I tell the truth and I am this new thing ... a Centrist.

People don't have to choose between the extreme left and right. Now there's the big center. It's the place where all compromises land, sooner or later – I just get there first.

In the legislative session, it happened time and again. I was between the rhetoric on the right and the rhetoric on the left. In January I proposed:

- Sales tax rebate of \$1.25 billion.

- Across the board tax relief, heavily weighted to middle income.
- A record tax package to keep faith with the voters.
- A balanced budget.

It all happened in May.

This session, I was absolutely flabbergasted by the posturing. Like banty roosters.

My office was a frequent meeting place. Sometimes I went to the leaders in the House or Senate. But it was clear that there was no point in working with individual members because the caucus system rules in Minnesota. Four leaders control the voting decisions of the vast majority. Here and there is a renegade like a Phil Krinkie, but the rest move in big blocks.

They are not serving the people – they are serving the caucus. It's called INCUMBENT PROTECTION, and that's what they do.

The Minnesota Legislature has 650 permanent staff and about another 190 who work during session. That's a lot of people, and a LOT of legislators.

You've heard me talk about UNICAMERAL, and today will be the first that I'm announcing some of what I'm thinking about for legislative reforms.

- We need to make sure that the number of legislators allows for districts of reasonable size (about 35,000 citizens).
- To be smart, we should think about providing a range that is easily divided by either 8 or 7. Why? To allow for redistricting to potentially take away one Congressional seat in 2010 if we lose population without reopening the Constitution.
- I believe that the partisan staff should be paid for by the parties, not the taxpayers. PERIOD. Other than allowing each member to have a staff person to handle their phones and correspondence, it is not sensible to have the taxpayers foot the bill for nothing but caucus positions and incumbent protection.
- True reform will involve the citizens in how the UNICAMERAL conducts its business. In Nebraska, for example, every bill needs a fiscal note. Doesn't it make sense that the public knows exactly what any given idea costs?
- I like very much the idea of electing committee chairs by secret ballot rather than having the Speaker of the House appoint based on seniority or loyalty to the party or whatever else reason they have.

I will have other specific recommendations fairly soon, but these are some principles that I have already decided as I move forward with an executive branch view of this important improvement to Minnesota government.

Governor Jesse Ventura
Remarks (Draft)
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