

It's no secret that our legislative process needs reform. Since January, my administration has learned a couple of important lessons:

1. The legislative process is a maze. Thousands of bills are introduced every session and most of them die at any one of eleven points. As a result, many good bills never reach the floor for a full debate and bad legislation can surface without public knowledge or input.
2. Only insiders and those paid to work the system really understand the legislative process. As a result, these legislators and lobbyists can easily manipulate it to their advantage.
3. Citizens are often left out or have minimal impact on the legislative process.

While some legislators and political pundits may argue that our current system works well, I believe that it results in:

A gap between policy makers and citizens;

A tendency to cater to special interests, rather than the public good; and

Increased cynicism towards government and a distrust of public officials.

There is a better way to do the people's business.

Minnesotans would be better served by a more principled, streamlined, open and accountable system. A nonpartisan unicameral, or single house legislature would provide this kind policy-making environment and cost about \$20 million less per year to operate.

I strongly believe that public policy should be grounded in principles, not politics; therefore, the first couple months of my term were spent deliberating guiding beliefs and principles for the Ventura-Schunk Administration.

With that in mind, my administration has three core beliefs:

1. Accountable, responsive and limited government
2. Personal responsibility and opportunities for self-sufficiency
3. Bring government back to the people

My three core budgetary principles are:

- A. Be fiscally conservative and prudent -- NEVER forget its the people's money
- B. Do the right things and do them well

### C. Provide incentives for desirable behavior

These beliefs and principles guided my decisions in the last legislative session. Not everyone may agree with these particular beliefs and principles, but we must get back to more principled -- and less partisan -- decision-making.

Our partisan two-house system makes this change difficult because it requires political posturing every step of the way. One house will pass a bad bill knowing that it will die in the other body or be fixed in a conference committee. A party caucus will introduce controversial amendments on the floor to force legislators of the opposing caucus to take a bad vote.

The process is so focused on strategies for accomplishing a particular agenda -- House, Senate, Democrat, Republican, rural, metro -- that issues become clouded and principles are replaced with politics.

In a nonpartisan single house, legislators would be more likely to debate issues based on merit. The people's agenda would take precedence over political agendas. What could be better for Minnesota?

A single house legislature would streamline the legislative process.

This is the legislative process in our current two-house system:

A bill must travel through committees -- often through multiple policy and finance committees -- in both houses before it is debated by each body on the floor. If the House and Senate pass slightly different versions of a bill, then it must go to conference committee where a handful of legislators will decide on the final details of the bill. The full House and Senate then receive a conference committee report, but they cannot make any changes to the report, they can only vote yes or no. If both houses adopt the report, then it is sent to my office for approval.

The legislative process doesn't need to be complicated to be effective.

Under a nonpartisan single house, citizens will not have to track legislation through multiple committee hearings in both bodies and through the conference committee process. All bills will be introduced and referred to a committee. If they have merit, they will advance to the floor and if a majority of legislators vote for a bill, it will then be sent to me for approval.

A unicameral legislative process is open and accountable.

Conference committees are notorious for their last-minute, behind-closed-doors deals in the dead of night. In a nonpartisan single house, major policy and budget decisions will no longer be made by a handful of powerful legislators serving on conference committees. Every debate,

every amendment and every vote will be conducted in the open and under the watchful eye of citizens.

Our current two-house system lacks accountability. Legislators are able to use the other legislative bodies to justify why a bill did or didn't pass. Under this system, people don't know whom to hold accountable for bad decisions. A single house legislature will require legislators to be responsible for their votes. Every vote will have real consequences, and as a result, legislators will carefully weigh issues rather than simply fall in line behind their caucus.

A nonpartisan single house legislature will provide a better environment for making good public policy. It will help:

Re-connect Minnesotans and their elected representatives;

Make the public good the center of debate; and

Re-engage citizens in the policy making process.

We are at a pivotal point in Minnesota politics. The people are not satisfied with "politics as usual" and they deserve the opportunity to vote whether to make the change to a nonpartisan single house system.

This is an important issue. It will change the way that government does its business. It will bring government back to the people and help restore the public's trust in our elected leaders.

While some legislators may not agree with this concept, I urge them to let the voters decide. I challenge my colleagues in the Legislature to work together with me to give Minnesotans the opportunity to vote on this issue.

Let the people decide how they will be governed.