

Thank you President Osnes for the kind introduction. I'm excited to be here at Hamline University today to discuss my top legislative priority—A SINGLE HOUSE LEGISLATURE.

This initiative is part of a bigger vision called “Service, Not Systems.” I was in Brainerd, Minnesota yesterday to kick off this vision as part of my Big Plan. It means a SIMPLER state government with INVOLVED CITIZENS. It means *shaking up* state government as we know it and looking at better and more efficient ways to serve Minnesotans in this new day.

Much has changed since we established our two-house system of government over 100 years ago.

- We've changed from a farming nation and state into the technology age. Today, the U.S. spends more on information systems in a year than on any other part of its industrial infrastructure. In about 5 years, 150 million Americans will be choosing the Internet to do business and get information. It will replace the drive across town or down to the Capitol in St. Paul.
- The changed economy means Minnesota competes not with Iowa, Wisconsin and the Dakotas, but with Japan, Mexico and Germany.

Government needs to take a hard look at how it can better serve today's citizens in this rapidly changing environment. It's time that we start asking tough questions and not accept the frequently used explanation “that's how it's always been done.” There are better ways to do the public's business—cheaper, faster, more focused on results, not process.

The “Service, Not Systems” vision emphasizes the end-game—how we get more bang for our buck. I've challenged all my commissioners to think about results and how we can get there from here. We're already starting to improve some services in the executive branch, but we need to look across all three branches of government for ways to improve services by reforming old systems.

The most obvious and important of these reforms is a smaller single house legislature.

There are many good reasons to consider the change to a single house legislature:

1. The legislative process is needlessly confusing and difficult follow. Only insiders and those paid to work the system really understand the legislative “process.”

Listen closely—those who oppose any consideration of a smaller single house legislature will rise up to defend our current process. Why? Because it is their process—the legislators and the lawyers and the lobbyists and the career bureaucrats. Only they understand it. Only they have time to play in it. Only they will lose power by letting the people have something easier to understand.

2. All too often, the most important decisions are made at the eleventh hour during marathon conference committee hearings. This last session saw the legislature voting on electronic computer versions of conference committee reports because the cliff-hanging conferees didn't allow time to even print the bills. Votes were taken on bills nobody read. So is it a surprise I carefully scrutinized them?

My government relations director didn't sleep from 6 AM Friday until 3 AM Monday trying to follow the conference committees rushing to the wire—mostly behind closed doors.

3. Citizens are often left out or have minimal impact on the legislative process. Who here would stay up 57 hours to try to have a voice?
4. The bottom line is this: there is no constitutional justification for two legislative bodies at the state level who serve the same population since the Supreme Court decision of one-man, one-vote in 1962.

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

- A tendency to cater to special interests, rather than the public good;
- A disconnect between policy makers and citizens; and
- Increased cynicism towards government.

I strongly believe that public policy should be grounded in principles, not politics. In results, not politics. In representation of the constituents, not service to the politics of the caucuses.

I believe in principles. That's why the first couple of months of my term were spent deliberating guiding beliefs and principles for the executive branch. That's my job as Governor. To have a vision and then find the best people to implement that vision around well understood beliefs.

My support for a single house legislature is grounded in the belief that government should be accountable, responsive and limited. AND while it's government's job to be accessible to the people, citizens must be active and engaged.

The legislative process doesn't need to be complicated to be effective. Rather, it should be simple, straightforward and understandable to encourage more citizen participation.

A more open process results in a more accountable and responsive legislature. In a single house, every debate, every amendment and every vote would be conducted in the open and under the watchful eye of citizens. Every vote would have real consequences, requiring legislators to carefully weigh issues and take responsible votes.

Working under these core beliefs, I believe that we can:

- Make the public good the center of debate;
- Re-engage Minnesotans and boost citizen participation; and
- Rebuild citizens' trust in government and public officials.

You'll be hearing from folks on the other side of this issue who will list off several reasons why we shouldn't make the change to a single house. Things like:

- 1) A unicameral legislature is prone to quick, emotional actions. Two houses are necessary to provide checks and balances.
- 2) Citizens, particularly rural people, will be less represented under a single house system.
- 3) Many changes can be made in statute or legislative rule, so we don't need a constitutional amendment.
- 4) Power is concentrated in even fewer hands in a single house.

I stand here as an advocate for a single house despite these arguments, but that's not really the most important thing I want you to take away from here today. The most important issue is this one: **NOTHING—ABSOLUTELY NOTHING**—should preclude the 2000 legislature from letting the people decide this issue.

The people deserve the opportunity to decide how they will be governed in the new millennium. It's an important dialogue and the people should have a seat at the table. That can only happen if the Legislature passes a bill to put the issue on the November 2000 ballot.

If the two-house legislature is deemed to be the best structure for serving the people, then the wisdom of the voters will be revealed after a spirited debate next summer and fall.

In either case, we all win by focusing the citizens back on their government in a creative, meaningful way.

I am here to launch a revolution against apathy. For months during my campaign, I educated adults who had never voted about when the general election was, how they could register, and why they needed to care about participating.

In record numbers they did show up. Today there are more voices than ever before debating tax policy, spending issues, and—yes—even something as weird-sounding as “unicameral.” A refreshing number of school board candidates are running for election in November. Citizens are flocking to serve on state boards and commissions.

And we are the better for it.

You’re here today because you are concerned about your government. I share your concern and I’m going to work very hard to give you a choice next fall. But it’s far more up to you to put this issue on the ballot.

Talk to your legislators. Tell them to let the people decide. Because, frankly, it’s just the American thing to do.

Thank you.