

Thank you for joining me today. I appreciate the opportunity to be here with you to talk about my top legislative priority—a single house legislature. I'd like to thank Rep. Abrams, Sen. Robertson and others for being here.

We've entered a new age. When this century began, we still pulled our plows with horses. But a better idea came along. Now we're at the turn of the century, and we've evolved from a farming state and nation into a fast-paced technology-based society.

In fact, close to *19 million* people now carry pagers, and almost *12 billion* messages were left in voice mailboxes in 1993 alone!

And while it won't replace whistle-stop campaigns and fireside chats—it will change politics and government as we know it.

It's time for Government to recognize that there are better ways to do the public's business—cheaper, faster, more focused on results, not process.

The Ventura Administration recognizes that state government must adapt to this changing environment. To do this we need a vision—a BIG Plan.

In October, my administration traveled around the state to talk about my BIG Plan for Minnesota. One of my four vision areas is "Service, Not Systems." It means a SIMPLER state government with INVOLVED CITIZENS. It means looking at better and more efficient ways to serve Minnesotans in this new day.

The "Service, Not Systems" vision emphasizes the end-game—how we get more bang for our buck. It's about:

- changing the mindset of those who work in state government to focus on people and results, not politics and processes;
- rewarding good behavior;
- working on long-term strategic plans that concentrate on getting results;
- defining governments' roles and responsibilities; and

- simplifying systems (like rulemaking and taxes) so that people can understand and participate.

The BIG Plan is not about spending more money—it's about spending smarter.

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 to follow.
2. All too often, the most important decisions are made at the eleventh hour during marathon conference committee hearings and floor sessions.
3. Citizens are often left out or have minimal impact on the legislative process.
4. The bottom line is this: Since the Supreme Court decision of one-person, one-vote in 1962, there is no constitutional justification for two legislative bodies at the state level who serve the same population

As an elected leader, I'm here to serve the people of Minnesota, not to preserve an outdated system that caters to special interests at the expense of the public good. And I believe my job is not to fuel the fires of public cynicism, but to instead inspire a new generation of citizens to be active in their government.

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.

I also believe that sometimes SIMPLE IS GOOD. The legislative process doesn't need to be complicated to be effective and deliberative.

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 that are grounded in an understanding of the bigger picture.

I'm here as an advocate for a single house. I recognize the work of many distinguished leaders who have encouraged this change for years. I agree with 5 former Governors, 5 of our 6 legislative leaders, and dozens of former and seated legislators that a single house would improve our legislative process and get better results.

But enough of that.

We could spend months debating the merits of one system vs. another. While I will be the first at the table for that debate, the only issue that the Legislature must decide in the next session is *whether this is a reasonable initiative to put on the ballot*.

I'm a strong believer in our representative democracy. We trust our elected leaders to make important policy and budgetary decisions for us, but this is a constitutional change that alters the very structure of our government.

And it is one that inherently contains a conflict of interest for legislators. In voting for a unicameral legislature, many of them would be voting themselves out of a job. Yet, this *is an issue worthy of the people's consideration*.

A couple of weeks ago I addressed the members of a House committee that will vote on a bill to let you decide this fundamental issue. Over 600 citizens turned out to hear the debate. At the end of my testimony, I took an informal poll of the audience.

I asked all those who support a single house to raise their hands—about 2/3 went up.

Then I asked those who support our current two-house system to raise their hands—about a third went up.

Finally, I asked them to raise their hands if they thought that the people should NOT decide this issue—not a single hand went up.

It's clear to me that this is an issue that the people—regardless of their position—want to decide.

We now have a great opportunity to engage Minnesotans in an important dialogue. What better time than now—at the turn of the century and the beginning of a new millennium—to revisit how we govern.

No matter which system is deemed to be the best structure for serving the people, the wisdom of the voters will be revealed after a spirited debate next summer and fall.



While it's up to the Legislature to determine whether the people have the opportunity to participate in this important dialogue, it's up to you to put this issue on the ballot. Talk to your legislators. Tell them to let the people decide.

Our major political parties count on a low voter turnout because it's easier for them to control their respective blocks of voters. But the '98 elections are a good example of what happens when new voters enter the scene. We now have a tripartisan government where no single party has a strong-hold on the legislative process.

Citizen participation is at the very core of my BIG Plan. One goal of my administration is at least 70% voter turnout in *every* election. Considering the decline in voter participation nationwide, it's easier said than done.

While I'm Governor, I will do my best to give you every opportunity to participate, but it is up to you to take full advantage of opportunities to help rebuild our democracy.

Working together, we will not fail.

Thank you.