

Good afternoon.

It's good to be in Florida where I am sure everyone is sick of reading and hearing about Chads and Dimples.

Well I assure you I am not going to bore you with any of that.

Why?

Because I'm sure you would rather hear about something even more controversial than the Florida recount.

So I'll talk about me.

Just over two years ago the people of Minnesota elected me their governor.

Many political insiders, editorial page writers and the academic elite in Minnesota and the nation shook their heads in disbelief and asked themselves how the heck my election could have happened.

Amazingly, two years later, democratic and republican insiders, the media and much of the academic world are still scratching their heads, wondering how it happened, and if it could happen again.

Well, I tell you how it happened, and how it could happen again.

It happened because the people of Minnesota were sick and tired of listening to the same old traditional political talk that the Democrats and the Republicans give them year after year, election after election.

Remember the presidential debates? And people wonder why the election was so close.

Minnesotans, like the character in the movie *Network*, said "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore."

My election happened because middle class, middle-of -the-road, centrists rose up and said to heck with the radical liberals to the left and the radical conservatives on the right.

It happened because sixty percent of the electorate in Minnesota does not strongly identify with either major party. They are independent thinkers.

It happened because the people of Minnesota were tired of the hypocrisy of the conventional politicians.

It happened because the republican candidate, and the democrat candidate, took huge amounts of special interest money and then looked the people in the eye and promised them that it wouldn't have any influence on how they governed.

It happened because I looked the people in the eye and said I would not accept special interest money and therefore there would be no question about its influence.

It happened because a third Minnesota party obtained major-party status in the 1994 election when a candidate for the U.S. Senate got 5% of the vote.

That made it easy for me to get on the general election ballot in 1998, make it a three-way race, and qualify for public campaign financing.

It happened because Minnesota's election laws allow same day registration.

Did you know that 15.8 percent of Minnesotans registered on Election Day with the overwhelming number casting their ballots for me?

And that fully one voter in eight admitted to voting only because I was on the ballot. Independent-thinking voters made their move in Minnesota.

You other states better be looking over your shoulder because I don't think this independent movement is done yet.

Especially if the congress and state legislators quit being hypocritical and provide easy access for voting, and public financing for campaigns in all the states.

In 1998, when I was elected, 61.4 percent of Minnesota's eligible voters went to the polls.

This compares to the national average of 36% for the same year.

It is interesting that year in and year out Minnesota and Maine generally lead the nation in voter turnout. Is it a coincidence that Minnesota and Maine are the only states with independent Governors?

All these things help but you also have to have a candidate who believes in candor and not pander.

And of course that reminds me of debates. Did you watch the presidential debates?

They didn't let third party candidates in. Fortunately, in my election in Minnesota, I was allowed to debate, even though I was a third party candidate.

In fact, before the debates I was polling less than ten percent. But once I was allowed to debate my numbers started to climb, and the rest is history.

Let's face it, the Democrats and the Republicans are operating like they don't have a clue what democracy is all about. To them democracy is: make it hard to vote, limit choices and only campaign on issues that appeal to special interest groups that can deliver votes.

Is it any wonder that people don't trust politicians?

When I debated in my campaign I stood next to the two traditional candidates, smiled, and said: "If you like what they represent, fine, vote for them. If you want honest and principled leadership then vote for me."

And I never used notes.

In one of the televised debates my opponents Hubert H. Humphrey, III and St. Paul Mayor Norm Coleman came with stacks of notebooks filled with research.

After the debate had started a woman from the League of Women voters thought she was doing a nice thing for me by handing me a yellow legal pad and a pencil.

She whispered to me, 'you'll probably need this.'

I handed her back the pencil and paper and said "no thank you ma'am". You see, if you speak from the heart and tell the truth, you don't need a long memory."

It seems to me that one of the most important things to look for in a debate is whether the candidate is real. Are the thoughts and ideas coming from their heart, or from a carefully calculated political strategy developed by a campaign consultant?

I think I was successful in my debates because I was authentic and not programmed.

The other thing is I won because I didn't spend a lifetime running for the job. I came from the private sector and when this is over I'll go back to the private sector.

I think that's the way the people want it.

If you spend a lifetime pandering to the 15% on the radical left and right, well good luck, because the 70% in the middle are going to send you packing.
Then of course you won't have a clue what to do with your life because all you've ever been is a politician.

So then what?

You go to work for a special interest.

Let's talk about special interests, lobbyists and money.

When I became Governor many in the press and all the lobbyists shook their heads and said well, he got elected but he sure as heck can't govern.

I think the lobbyists were upset because they gave all their money to the losers and I wouldn't take any of their money.

Just think, I won an election, have been governing for almost two years, and I haven't taken a dime from a special interest group.

Washington politicians ought to try it. It's not only fun--it works.

Of course, a lot of people who like the traditional system of pandering and fund raising are out there just waiting for me to fail.

I hate to disappoint them, but I will not fail.

You know why?

I will not fail because I am not torn by allegiances to special interest groups that give me thousand of dollars.

I will not fail because I am free to do the right thing and not the politically correct thing.

I will not fail because I have a smart hard working cabinet and together we can seek bold reforms and not worry about the political fallout.

I will not fail because if I am not re-elected I can go back to the private sector and not miss a wink of sleep.

But in the meantime there are some things that need to be done.

- We need to make it easier to vote.
- We need more and better-informed voters.
- We need more candidates, especially candidates that have the courage of their convictions and aren't democrats and republicans. And,
- We need campaign finance reform.

Last year, candidates, political parties and advocacy groups spent over 3 billion dollars during the campaign season.

Can you believe that? Well, believe it.

And what is the result of all that spending? The status quo.

The same democrats and republicans are going back. This is an incumbent's playing field. This is a democrat and republican playing field. And until we equalize the playing field the political landscape isn't going to change.

If we hope to re-engage individual citizens in our political process, we must limit the influence of special interest money in campaigns, level the playing field between challengers and incumbents, and focus on real issues, not 30-second sound bytes.

Of particular concern to me is spending by the political parties, and legislative caucuses on behalf of their candidates.

While parties and advocacy groups should have the opportunity to express their views, the current barrage of negative and misleading ads is not only troublesome, it is disgusting.

This unregulated political activity threatens the integrity of our system and I am not hopeful that any democrats or republicans are interested in fixing the system.

But they must.

In the meantime what can we, the people, do when these parties are acting irresponsible? What can we do when special interest groups send out last minute hit pieces that are full of distortions, misleading statements, and misrepresentations of a candidates position?

What can we do when a candidate tells the biggest lie in politics:

"Oh, well, ah, I was not aware that my party was sending out that piece about my candidate. I am sorry if the ad was misleading, but it was an independent expenditure by the party that was not authorized by me."

And then the sanctimonious refrain follows:

"But you can be sure that, once I am re-elected, I will work hard to change these campaign finance laws to prevent this kind of abuse.

In my mind, hypocrisy is the greatest sin of all.

People often ask me how, given my provocative nature, I manage to remain popular with the people.

I'll tell you how:

Because while I may be controversial, I am up front and truthful about what I am doing.

And since the day I entered the race for governor, I have never taken one single penny from a special interest group. I came into politics with no strings attached and if you look closely, two years later, still no strings.

That is what the people want.

They want the real thing. They want genuine talk straight from the heart.
Could a Jesse Ventura election happen again?

Think about this:

What if John McCain would have had the courage to run as a third party independent? If he would have, I don't think they'd still be counting votes here in Florida. I think John McCain could have won.

It could have happened and someday it will.

Thank you.

(I'll be happy to answer a few questions if we have time)