

Governing Without Strings Attached

It's good to be back.

It was just about two years ago that I stood at this podium.

A lot of controversy has gone over the dam since then.

But it still feels good.

Thanks for inviting me back.

I'm not going to talk long today. I've got some prepared remarks here that I'll start with, but I would rather spend most of my time answering your questions.

You see, as I said, I've been through a lot in the last two years and I'm not sure which controversy it is that interests you the most.

And since there is no way I can cover them all, I'll just let you ask me about them.

You probably are interested in the Playboy interview.

Or maybe it's the two books I've written.

How about whether I'm running for re-election? Or maybe you're interested in whether I plan to run for President in 2004?

Interested in my relationship with media jackals?

How about the XFL?

Maybe you're interested in my cameo appearance on the Young and the Restless.

Oh, and don't forget Summer Slam--that caused a little controversy.

I do tend to keep busy. But not too busy to govern.

You know, a lot of people wondered whether this Tripartisan Government in Minnesota would work.

But I think it is working very well.

Last year at my urging the legislature passed, and we broke ground for the first light rail system in Minnesota.

And we've been working real hard to sell the State of Minnesota. In fact, in the last two years tourism in Minnesota has increased and is now a \$10 billion dollar industry.

Also in the last two years we have reduced taxes in Minnesota by over \$2 billion dollars.

And we have sent sales tax rebates back to citizens that amounted to almost \$2 billion dollars. (In fact, I thought I might suggest the rebate strategy to President Bush.)

And then we have been working hard on future initiatives.

I say 'we' because I have a great cabinet and you know what they say about 'only being as good as the people around you.'

Well, I have very talented people around me. And we've been working on things like:

- Cutting-edge tax reform that would adapt Minnesota's tax system to the new economy.
- Property tax relief for farmers, senior citizens and businesses.
- Reforming the way we pay teachers and seeking accountability for tax dollars spent on education.
- Health care for all children.
- Telecommunications reform.
- Workforce development, and
- Campaign finance reform.

Yet there are those who are skeptical.

I don't know about you, but since I became governor I haven't noticed that our state's stature among other states has been reduced.

It's probably not very often that a Minnesota governor is invited to spend a day with Harvard University economists and then to speak at the Kennedy School of Government.

I'm sure it's been a while since a Minnesota governor was invited to lecture at the Nixon Library, Georgetown University, Princeton, Johns Hopkins, Carleton, the Naval Academy and West Point.

Although I'm not your typical governor, I am proud of these invitations and I try to represent my state well.

Can you think of the last time a Minnesota governor was invited to spend the night at the White House with a president who was not of his party?

Or the last time a Minnesota governor was asked to advise the president-elect of another party on world trade?

Can you think of the last time a governor was elected with 37% of the vote but has had job approval ratings consistently in the 70% range?

But I think it is important to point out that while many may think that this attention is a result of the 'celebrity' factor, it probably is more about the fact that a third party won a governor's race.

And it may also have to do with my straightforward style.

And maybe the success is partly about the fact that I have not had a fundraiser since I was sworn into office.

See, no strings attached.

It's great.

Of course I get criticized for making money on weekends. I'm an entertainer and have been all my life and so occasionally I will make a few dollars entertaining on the weekends.

I can't wait until the next time a farmer is elected Governor of Minnesota. Can you imagine the uproar when the farmer governor goes home for the weekend and sells his or her corn crop to the local elevator?

Oh my god! The farmer governor is making money while in office. Doesn't he know that being governor is a full-time job?

I wonder what my critics would say if I was traveling around every weekend raising money for my campaign chest? That would be okay, I'm sure.

No thanks. I don't take bribes.

In fact I recommend it to all politicians.

You sleep well. And you don't have to go to those God-awful fundraisers, eat those little wieners and pretend you are aware of some lobbyist's problem with an amendment to a bill that you've never heard of.

And you know what? Having no strings attached is so great that if I run for re-election I will promise the people of Minnesota that I will not actively raise a dime.

The people of Minnesota will know my record. If they approve, they will re-elect me. If not, they won't.

Win or lose, my conscience will be clear.

In fact, that's why I'm having so much fun right now. I don't have to check with anybody before I make a decision.

I especially don't have to check with my caucus leader.

We need more independent leaders who don't have to check their conscience at the caucus room door.

Finally, as one of two independent governors in the United States, I want to leave you with one last thought about our current political system.

The following is a quote from a book:

"The two party system has given this country the war of Lyndon Johnson, the Watergate of Nixon, and the incompetence of Carter. Saying we should keep the two party system because it is working is like saying the Titanic voyage was a success because a few people survived on life rafts."

The person who said that is quite outspoken, known to ruffle the feathers of conventional politicians, and could not care less if he offends anyone with his opinions. The media loves him because he's always good for a provocative quote, he's an author of more than one book, and lately he's taken to writing poetry.

The person who made that very provocative statement is Eugene J. McCarthy.

A book that contains this quote was written by another unconventional politician who could not care less if he offends anyone with his opinions and whose quotes are sought after by the media.

The book is *Do I Stand Alone?* and the author is Jesse Ventura.

I put that quote in my book, not to demean the presidents mentioned, but because I respect Gene McCarthy and share his view that while this is a great country, we can change and we can do better.

In the last two years I have experienced and learned a lot. But the most important thing that I have learned is this.

I do not stand alone.

There are many people who stand with me. I meet them daily. They are so nice and so encouraging.

Governor Jesse Ventura
National Press Club
Washington, D.C.
February 26, 2001



5

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They tell me to keep on givin' em hell.

And rest assured, I will.

Thank you.