

Summary of Meeting with Wendell Anderson

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle #920, Bloomington, MN 55437

Friday, November 18, 2005

Attendance: Verne C. Johnson, chair; Jim Hetland, John Mooty (by phone), Jim Olson (by phone), John Sampson (by phone), Paul Gilje, Gary Clements, and Wendell Anderson, guest

A. Introduction of Wendell Anderson--Verne introduced Anderson, former Olympic hockey player, DFL Party member, former state legislator, former governor, former U. S. Senator, former regent at the University of Minnesota, and honorary Swedish counsel. Verne drew attention of the caucus to Anderson's picture on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1973. Anderson said an average of two times a week people still mention this issue of *Time* to him. In his opening comments Anderson made the following points:

1. Complete agreement with Bill Frenzel--Anderson said he read the summary of our meeting last Friday with Frenzel and said he agrees completely with what Frenzel had to say.

2. Concentrate on Minnesota issues--Anderson read a sentence from the draft document on threats to America's democracy which indicated that we'd be concentrating chiefly on the national government, not the state government. It is extremely difficult to make changes at the federal level, he said, despite major problems at that level. He advised the caucus to concentrate on making changes in Minnesota.

3. Importance of two-party participation in all races--Anderson took note of the absence of the Republican Party in the two recent races for mayor in St. Paul and Minneapolis. It is not good for the state for the Republicans to have abandoned the central cities, he said. He remembers a time when the Republicans dominated the city of Minneapolis.

4. State had great leadership in the past from both parties--He took note of a time in 1962 when outstanding Republican legislators were elected. He then mentioned that five times during the 60s and 70s a Minnesotan (Humphrey and Mondale) was on the national presidential ticket.

5. Problems of sub-caucuses--He said single-issue people began to dominate DFL politics sub-caucuses in the early 1970s. Until that occurred, the makeup of the DFL endorsement convention closely paralleled that of the DFL voting population. He recalled that in 1970 Hubert Humphrey defeated Earl Craig for DFL endorsement for U.S. Senator by a 79%-21% margin, which was approximately the same margin that

Humphrey beat Craig in the primary. Since the sub-caucuses were begun, he said, most DFL endorsed candidates have not been elected.

6. Minnesota has been a leader for the nation--Anderson recalled that Minnesota enacted a progressive income tax in 1933 and dedicated every dollar to K-12 education until 1955-57. During World War II Minnesota led the nation in the fewest rejections of armed forces inductees for reasons of education and health.

7. Strategic importance of the University of Minnesota--He recalled the connection between the University and business development, heavily in the health field, in the 1950s and 1960s. The Governor and Legislature failed to take the opportunity to continue that effort by giving the "U" significant funds for stem cell research. Instead we let California take the lead, which in a referendum dedicated \$300 million a year for 10 years for stem cell research.

8. Business community still is enlightened--He mentioned the \$750 million proposal by the business community to the 2005 Legislature for strengthening transportation.

9. Opportunity for state leadership on teaching children to read--He thinks that Minnesota could lead the nation in an effort to guarantee that by the end of the third grade all children should be able to read. He cited statistics about the inability for many disadvantaged children to read by the end of the third grade and how such results lead later to low high school graduation rates. He also noted the high percentages of teen pregnancy and the resulting life of poverty for teen mothers.

B. Discussion with Anderson--During the discussion with Anderson the following points were made:

1. Absence of political leadership--Anderson was asked what caused the decline in political leadership along with tightening of governmental purse strings and what might be done about it. Anderson repeated his concern about emergence of sub-caucuses. Anderson said we must find ways to develop leaders of the quality of Luther Youngdahl and Harold Stassen. He recalled Gerald Christenson's leadership as State Planning Director, in developing a national model for right-to-read.

One small step to improve leadership, Anderson suggested, is to require that U.S. Senators and Representatives relinquish chairmanships of congressional committees upon reaching the age of 65. He recalled an important committee meeting when he was in the U.S. Senate where the chair had fallen asleep

Anderson said President Bush's failure to take leadership on the Katrina hurricane as an indication of the president's being out of touch with the public. He could have done so much more in utilizing the National Guard for such needs as providing medical care, feeding people, and providing engineers.

During discussion the point was made that while we are critical of the federal government, so much of America today has expectations that the federal government is the place to turn for leadership.

2. Ways to revitalize caucuses?--Anderson said he hopes that young people in college would be encouraged to participate and that large law firms would enable their lawyers to run for public office. He said he deeply enjoyed his service in the State Legislature and would not have been frustrated staying there instead of pursuing high office.

He recalled that Jerry Christenson was able to obtain funding for three or four programs on public television to educate people about the Legislature. He thinks that maybe public television could help with revitalizing caucuses.

3. The strict litmus tests for both Republicans and Democrats--Because of the influence of the single issue groups, it's impossible today to be a Democratic candidate for president and be anything but pro-choice, and it's impossible to be a Republican candidate and be pro-choice.

4. His support for light rail--Anderson recalled riding all over St. Paul as an 11 year old on the old streetcars. He said he was an advocate of light rail in the early '70s when the Citizens League was opposed.

5. Concern over campaign finance--Citing an example of receiving a late-night phone call from Ted Kennedy seeking campaign funds, Anderson said that all our Senators seem to spend the last two years of a term raising money. He doesn't know who can afford to run for the Senate any more. Nevertheless, he repeated his counsel that we concentrate on state issues, not national issues. We should see if we can get a handle on finances for state races. He thinks more people are using the check-off option on income tax forms than was indicated in a previous summary.

Asked about 527 groups, Anderson said he'd support disclosure of gifts through them.

6. Concern over length of state legislative sessions--Anderson recalled the reason a bill for annual sessions in Minnesota passed was because a TV station constantly was publicizing the extra daily expense of a special session. He said the length of session in the off-year could be very short if the Governor insisted in advance on prior agreement on the agenda.

7. Remember the "U"--He stated his conviction that in the past there were "old-timers" who took care of the University of Minnesota in the Legislature. He was aware of those people, many of whom were also lawyers in private practice. It's hard to find a practicing lawyer in the Legislature today.

8. Support for third parties?--Anderson said he is a two-party person. In response to a question he said he doesn't know much about instant runoff voting.

9. Unity that crosses party lines--Anderson recalled many times he appeared on panels with Elmer Andersen, Al Quie, and Arne Carlson, all Republicans. They were singing the same tune with Anderson, a Democrat. He thinks it is critical we again find leaders with common objectives, such as teaching children to read by the third grade.

He also recalled being a student at the University of Minnesota law school and that Jim Hetland was very popular with students and one of his best professors.

C. Thanks--Verne thanked Anderson for meeting with us. Verne said Anderson will be receiving a summary of our meeting before the summary is mailed to electronic participants, so that he can have an opportunity to make corrections in advance.