

Summary of meeting - Roger Moe, former MN Senate DFL majority leader

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle, Bloomington, MN 55437

Friday, October 30 ,2009

Present: Verne Johnson, chair; David Broden, Janis Clay (by phone), Marianne Curry, Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland, Dan Loritz, Wayne Popham (by phone), and Bob White

A. Context of the meeting--The Civic Caucus is beginning a major phase of concentrating on redesign of public services in Minnesota. A Civic Caucus draft position paper on redesign was prepared this week and was the subject for much of today's discussion.

B. Welcome and introductions--Verne and Paul welcomed and introduced **Roger Moe**, former majority leader, Minnesota State Senate. Currently he is president of his own consulting business, National Strategies, Inc. First elected to the State Senate representing a district in the Ada area of northwestern Minnesota, Moe subsequently became the longest serving Senate majority leader in the history of the state. He was Skip Humphrey's running made in an unsuccessful gubernatorial race in 1988. Moe lost to Tim Pawlenty for Governor in 2002. He was reared on the family farm near Crookston, MN. He graduated from Mayville State College and taught math and coached wrestling in Ada.

C. Comments and discussion--During Moe's comments and in discussion with the Civic Caucus the following points were raised:

1. No more office seeking--Responding to a question Moe said that he won't run again for Governor. Two statewide campaigns were enough for him, he said. Also he's now 65 and enjoys more relaxing at his lake home.

2. Lack of collaborative governance--The key problem facing the Governor and the majority and minority in the Legislature today is the absence of sitting down and listening to one another, he said.. They use divisive rhetoric. The absence of collaboration is a greater problem than the specific areas of concern, such as the mix of taxes.

The days of 50-percent-plus-one politics are over, he said. When discussion of a controversial subject is just beginning, you need to get buy-in by majority and minority. Issues drive the process. The best governors understand these things. They know they are serving as CEO for a limited time and want to see some impact from their policies. They also have a long-term view and want to set things in place that will be around after they are gone. The governor is in a unique position to lay out a vision for the future.

3. On Board of National Policy Consensus Initiative--Moe said he serves on the board of the National Policy Consensus Initiative, whose objective is to play a catalytic role in helping state leaders develop a collaborative system of governance. Co-chairs are James Geringer, former governor of Wyoming, and Ruth Ann Minner, former governor of Delaware.

4. Legislators, too, can stimulate collaboration--Bringing people of differing opinions together for collaboration isn't the sole prerogative of the Governor, Moe said. He suggested that chairs of legislative committees have stature and can exercise the

power to convene. That also goes for legislators convening groups of citizens in their home districts. If they're strong, they don't necessarily need to stake out a position in advance. See four-minute U-tube comment by Moe on collaboration at: (<http://bit.ly/2kXITv>).

5. Don't squander the opportunity for an early start on solving a budget shortfall--The state's budget shortfall, already announced as \$4 billion for the biennium beginning July 1, 2009, could be as high as \$7.1 billion. Even the minimum is so large that the state can't afford to wait until the 2009 Legislature convenes to make all the adjustments, Moe said. The 2010 Legislature can take some immediate steps. He advocated:

--Fix in 2010 the matter of general assistance medical care (GAMC), care for the poorest of the poor. Bill Blazar of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce is spearheading an effort to come up with a proposal.

--Extend in 2010 the state 6.5 percent sales tax to clothing. Such an action would yield about \$396 million a year, according to Minnesota House Research (<http://bit.ly/4bQPvt>).

6. Importance of personal responsibility--A prime opportunity for redesign is in health care, Moe said. He recalled attending a health care forum sponsored by a Minnesota member of Congress. He couldn't believe how people were blaming everyone else for the health care problem: doctors, lawyers, drug companies. It was everyone else's fault. No one took personal responsibility. Think of what losing weight, eating better, doing exercise, and stopping smoking could do, he said.

7. Re-evaluate priorities on economic development--Moe questioned more investment in such areas as the Department of Energy and Economic Development and extended unemployment compensation if such actions consume state dollars that could have been invested in extending post secondary education opportunities to more people. Moe said he hears that some post secondary institutions are phasing out certain technical classes that are urgently needed but high in per student expenses in favor of lower cost liberal arts classes that attract large numbers of students.

8. Elevate the position of teacher--Maybe a specialized teachers education institution ought to be re-created, Moe suggested, remembering the state's teachers colleges that gradually evolved into state universities. During the time of teachers colleges, teaching was a much higher respected occupation, he said. Moe recalled speaking to a group of students at Bemidji High School about nine years ago. Only three students raised their hands when he asked whether they intend to go into teaching. In response to a question, Moe acknowledged that problems could arise if leadership in a specialized teachers institution were closed-minded on opening new roles for teachers.

9. Possible changes in elections--Responding to a question about whether changing the precinct-caucus-party endorsement-primary election system would produce more office holders committed to collaboration, Moe said he would like to move the state primary election date to June.

10. Producing specific ideas for change--As the discussion moved to whether citizens and organizations in the state are generating enough good ideas which the Governor and Legislature could consider, Moe said he has reserved four web domains titled "If I were governor..." He'd like to make those domains available to whatever group would like to collect suggestions from citizens around the state. Perhaps it would be Growth & Justice, the Center of the American Experiment, the Citizens League or some other group who would bring credibility to the effort. The organization could collect the ideas, distill them down, and share them broadly in the state. A member commented that whoever spearheads the effort needs to have a statewide focus. The Civic Caucus new draft report, Different Choices, calls for just such a program, Verne said.

11. Having a plan of where you want to go--Moe said he uses a jigsaw puzzle analogy to illustrate the importance of having a picture in mind of the future. Some people start working on a jigsaw puzzle by organizing the pieces by color or by border. Others start working on the puzzle by keeping the top of the box in front of them--so they can see the big picture.

12. Question of a state planning arm--Instead of a state planning agency, one person suggested that perhaps the state needs a third legislative body, one that would meet every two years for a couple of months and present to the House and Senate its recommendations. Moe said such an idea, regardless of its merits, is well nigh impossible.

13. Thanks--On behalf of the Civic Caucus, Verne thanked Moe for meeting with us today.