

Summary of Meeting with Peter Hutchinson

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

Friday, Jan. 20th, 2006

Present: Verne C. Johnson, chair, Chuck Clay, Jim Hetland. Via phone , John Mooty, Jim Olson and John Sampson

Peter Hutchinson, guest speaker

1. Who is Peter Hutchinson? The chair introduced Hutchinson, who is the founder and President of Public Strategies Group. He graduated from Dartmouth College, earned an MPA degree from Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, and completed the advanced management program at Harvard Business School.

Hutchinson was the former Minnesota Commissioner of Finance under Gov. Perpich and Deputy Mayor of Minneapolis under Mayor Don Fraser. In 1993 his firm took over management of the Minneapolis public school system, in which he served as Superintendent. His firm has helped redesign public systems in New York state, in the state of Washington and elsewhere.

2. Our system, both at the national and Minnesota level, is not working well today -- Agrees with most of the criticism others have voiced to date and with the symptoms listed by the Civic Caucus. Can remember the days - the 1960's and 70's - when Minnesota was thought of as the public policy incubator for the nation. Ideas such as the Metropolitan Council, tax-base-sharing, a strong commitment to education and to higher education. Today this is not the case. Minnesota is no longer thought of as a leader in innovation - but we ought to be.

3. It is the nature of government not to change - not to reform itself - but rather to protect its system and traditions -- This is instinctive with any organization, whether public or private.

4. The legislative bodies are today led by the two extremes, making it exceedingly difficult to compromise -- Compromise is punished. Loyalty is rewarded. There is no incentive to compromise as the individuals are then criticized for compromising on principle. This has led to increasing polarization and paralysis of our political decision process.

5. It is naive to believe that either of the two political parties in Minnesota will reform themselves from within -- Reform must come from outside forces. It always has and always will.

6. The key is to make the political system competitive. This is the way it has happened historically in Minnesota -- This has in the past come from the formation of third parties winning the governorship. The result has not been permanent as this result has reformed the two parties and the new party has tended to be integrated into one or the other of the two major political parties.

7. Reforming the way in which redistricting is accomplished is essential. Reform will not come from within. Must be forced from outside. Likely will be forced by the court someday. Favor a nonpartisan commission appointed by the state supreme court.

8. In response to a question Hutchinson agreed that the non-redistricted U.S. senate is not much less polarized -- Much of this results from the fact that most Senators previously served as house members and became comfortable with the way the house process worked. We need to find a way to lessen this likelihood.

9. Michigan has reformed its legislature by establishing a maximum of three two year terms for house members -- Once having served the three two year terms, the individual is ineligible to run again even later.

Am not sure what the proper limit is but we need some way to preclude long term legislative service.

10. Campaign financing remains essentially invisible, despite years of purported financing reform --

David Schultz is an expert on this issue. You must talk to him on campaign finance and ways to reform it. Most contributions today are still undisclosed to the public.

11. We must make all campaign contributions and spending reportable and open to the public --

Efforts to limit the amounts contributed are less important than making the system completely visible. The voters will punish excesses once they know about them.

12. Today we are engaged in the politics of fear rather than hope. We must and can change this --

The purpose of political ads nowadays is to produce fear in the voter. My plan is to test the assumption that this is the most effective way to campaign. I will be making a major announcement on Jan. 25th and my purpose will be to preach hope for what Minnesota can be rather than attack the opposition to produce fear.

13. The five G's are dominating political discussion today. This must be changed --

The five "G" include Guns, gays, gambling, God and gynecology. This domination of the political process with social issues is diverting attention from the real issues. We must shift the focus from such wedge issues as gay marriage and abortion to what he dalls "the main things" - education, health care, transportation and the environment.

14. The Civic Caucus ought to meet with the 20/20 group in the Minnesota legislature.

They are a very hopeful sign.

15. In response to questions concerning his advocacy of the multiparty system Hutchinson emphasized that this need not be a permanent arrangement --

As in the past the third parties have been introduced as a means of shaking up the entrenched two party system and need not bed permanent. Without this neither of the two main parties will reform themselves. Reform invariably comes from outside not from within.

16. Today's media are contributing to our problems --

The intellectual horsepower of reporting is not what it used to be. Staff reductions by newspapers has led to a lesser depth of reporting, less experienced reporters, and a tendency to report primarily attack statements issued by leaders in each of the two major parties. Those in less than a leadership position are essentially ignored. This will be a major challenge for a third party candidate. He feels sorry for reporters who are too rushed today. He attributes the problem more to this factor than to biased reporting..

17. In response to a question concerning the challenge of a third party candidate raising sufficient funds

to get the message across, Hutchinson responded with the statement that he had not found this to be a serious problem thus far.

18. In today's campaigning development of lists for purposes of intensive communication during the campaign is indispensable.

The two parties have them in depth and he is mindful of the importance of doing this as well.

19. Hutchinson stated that he is a true independent --

He has never been an active participant in either major party. He went to one caucus session years ago and was so turned off that he has never gone again.

20. One of the major issues which must be resolved involves health care --

A recent statement issued by an organization of Drs. was very promising for reform. This issue will be a critical one in the next political campaign

21. In response to a question involving the establishment of some form of watchdog council of former political leaders, Hutchinson was positive but emphasized endorsing a candidate as vital to the importance to their impact.

22. The chair thanked Hutchinson for his perceptive and candid sharing of thoughts. He was further urged to feel free to make additional comments from time to time as we move ahead with additional interview sessions.