

## Summary of Meeting with Chuck Slocum

Civic Caucus - 8301 Creekside Circle, Bloomington, MN 55437  
Thursday, May 17, 2007

**Present:** Verne Johnson, chair; Chuck Clay, Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland Dennis Johnson, Jim Olson (by phone)

**Guest speaker:** Chuck Slocum, consultant, former chair, Minnesota Independent-Republican Party (1975-1977)

**A. Context of the meeting** --Today's meeting is one of several the Civic Caucus is conducting with thought leaders on the subject of possible changes in the state's elections process that might help restore the state its previous leadership role and help preserve representative democracy.

**B. Introduction of the speaker** --Verne introduced Chuck Slocum, who since 1990 has been president of the Williston Group, a firm that provides business development services for companies, non-profit organizations and government agencies. He served as state chair of Minnesota Republicans from 1975-1977. He has held executive positions at Dayton Hudson (Target) Corporation and Honeywell. Among other positions he has held are executive director of the Minnesota Business Partnership, president of the Minnesota Arthritis Foundation, and general manager and president of Single House Minnesota, a group that worked for a unicameral legislature.

**C. Comments and discussion** --In Slocum's comments and in discussion with the Civic Caucus, the following points were raised:

**1. Wrap-up of the current legislative session** --Slocum believes the Legislature will finish its work without a special session, because the Governor and House have lots of motivation to get the job done. Budget challenges facing lawmakers are incredible, primarily because of growing health care expenses he said. Property taxes, while important, aren't as serious a problem as in the 1970s, when the state had taxpayer rebellions.

**2. Goals of Democrats and Republicans** --Slocum looks beyond the conventional wisdom that Democrats love tax increases and Republicans love tax cuts. Democrats believe that government is a tool to make things better, but they should focus on how to improve services, not just increase state government spending. Republicans can't just talk about starving the beast but must address--through public and private efforts--the wellbeing of those who are unable to care for themselves. Both groups need to work on how they can move together in a growing economy.

Later in the discussion Slocum agreed that it is critical for Minnesota to work on changing systems to achieve better results. Asked whether the business community could take the lead, he replied that business often is conflicted because of tax and spend economic issues. Citizens groups must also lead, he said.

**3. Big problem of a work force shortage** --The state faces a great challenge in having an adequate work force. About 30 percent of our youth are not prepared for employment. We need to grow our work force from within, which means providing

effective training and education. If Minnesota doesn't succeed in this effort, businesses that need employees will leave the state. We have a tremendous challenge here, he said, particularly with all the growing tech-related job areas. There's no question that employers will move to where they will find employees.

**4. Lack of action on early childhood education** --A founder of Minnesota Business for Early Earning (MnBEL) Slocum said there will be some progress, but not nearly enough, related to early childhood education. The movement to provide all-day kindergarten statewide attracted more support than helping younger, pre-kindergarten children be prepared for school. Working parents must be a central part of the school readiness of their children.

**5. Why Minnesota has lost its position as a leader among states** --Slocum recalled that Minnesota in the 1970s was the first state to enact a non-smokers rights law, but it is 20th among the states in enacting, this year, a statewide ban on indoor smoking. Minnesota is no longer a "bellweather" leader, he said, because the techniques of winning elections seem to have taken precedence over the visioning of what government ought to be in the future. Political parties seem to be neglecting two major responsibilities, the convening of like-minded citizens to develop a public policy agenda for the future, and to recruit the best and the brightest to run for office.

**6. Support for multiple endorsements** --Slocum said he supports a bi-partisan effort, the Council for Electoral Leadership, that is working for an earlier primary date. Slocum also favors multiple endorsements by parties, provided candidates receive a certain threshold of support, say 25-30 percent of delegate support. Slocum does not believe that precinct caucuses, once a quality control mechanism for parties, serve that purpose any longer, since they most often reflect the thinking of extreme partisans on the right and left.

**7. Curious about instant runoff voting** --Asked about instant runoff voting that recently has been approved for Minneapolis city elections and is under consideration in St. Paul, Slocum said he is curious about the idea but doesn't know enough yet to have an opinion. The idea of the two top vote-getters as General Election opponents is sound as is the idea of maintaining viable political parties throughout the state.

**8. Possibility of a unicameral Legislature** --Slocum said he was active in a group that was supporting former Governor Ventura's idea for a single house Legislature. In the end it was not possible to place the unicameral amendment (which also reduced the size of the legislature by one-third) on the ballot because the people most inconvenienced by the action (existing legislators) are the same people who decide whether to submit the question to the voters. We have a bicameral system that was created in the 1800s, he said, but state government needs updating and reform to be most effective in the 21st century.

**9. Possibility of presidential preference primary in Minnesota** --Slocum is not overly concerned that Minnesota isn't part of the competition among states to hold early presidential primary elections. He would support dividing the nation into several regional primaries, one of which would include Minnesota, an idea that has bipartisan support, he said.

**10. Electoral college future?** --Slocum said he supports direct election of the president. He said he is not well informed about a proposal to have state legislatures instruct their electors to support the winner of the national popular vote, an idea that would have the effect of making the Electoral College irrelevant. It was noted that currently many citizens in heavily-Democratic or heavily-Republican states don't bother to vote because the outcome in their states is a foregone conclusion.

**11. Role of the media** --Slocum doesn't blame the media for dysfunction in government. The problem is that the public has so little interest in the subject and that mainstream media is not influential among those under age 40. It was noted in the discussion that many people who have met with the Civic Caucus believe current media trends to cut back on public affairs coverage are irreversible.

**12. Potential areas of focus for the Civic Caucus** --Slocum said the summaries provided by the Civic Caucus are an important service to the community. He suggested that perhaps the Civic Caucus ought to focus on a few high priority items. He liked the way the Civic Caucus thoughtfully focused on the question of legislative prerogative and unnecessary state constitutional amendments.

**13. Need to train and nurture future leaders** --In addition to attention to Minnesota's future workforce, Slocum suggested that the Civic Caucus might play a mentoring role in training and nurturing people for future leadership. He said he has spent much of his time in the past recruiting people for public office. It's critical to encourage, affirm, and help leaders to succeed.

**14. Thanks** --Verne thanked Slocum for meeting with us today, particularly in light of Slocum's recent 15-foot fall from a ladder, injuring his head.