

Good Afternoon.

I'm glad to be here today to speak about a topic that was one of the top priorities of my campaign last year, and has become a top priority of my administration: A unicameral legislature.

We have definitely entered a new age.

The days of getting our information over the back fence, or at the barbershop aren't necessarily gone—and they shouldn't be—if that's the way we choose to live.

But there are so many more choices now.

It's mind-boggling.

Did you know that the United States spends more on information systems in a year than on any other part of its industrial infrastructure?

And in about 5 years over 150 million Americans will be choosing the Internet to do business and get information.

While it may not replace whistle-stop campaigns and fireside chats—it will give us so many more opportunities and definitely change politics and government as we know it.

Of course, technology isn't the only thing that is changing the way we do politics—

I think a certain ex-wrestler getting elected governor of Minnesota may have a little to do with the changing of the way we do politics.

But seriously, Government—at all levels—needs to take a hard look at how it can use this new technology to better serve its citizens.

Thanks to innovations in technology there are better ways to do the public's business—cheaper, faster, more focused on results, not process.

In October, I traveled around the state to talk about the BIG Plan for Minnesota.

One of the key components of my Big Plan is seizing the opportunity to use technology to:

- limit the size of state government
- increase accountability of state government
- and simplify systems (like lawmaking, rulemaking and taxes) so that people can better understand and better participate in their government.

We call this our “Service, Not Systems” vision.

There are a lot of systems out there that have been around for a long time.

Systems that were designed for a world without technology.

I’ve challenged all my commissioners to think about serving our citizens in this new age. And not to be locked into the same old systems.

And while we are already starting to improve some services in the executive branch, we need to look across all three branches of government for ways to improve services by reforming old systems.

The most obvious and important of these reforms is a smaller single house legislature.

Today, I want to talk specifically about this reform.

Many people ask me, why are you so excited about a unicameral legislature?

Well there are many good reasons to consider the change to a single house legislature:

First, The legislative process is needlessly confusing and difficult to follow and I fundamentally believe in simpler and limited government that is accountable to the people.

Second, all too often the most important decisions are made at the eleventh hour during marathon conference committee hearings and floor sessions.

Third, Citizens are often left out or have minimal impact on the legislative process.

And finally, since the Supreme Court decision of one-person, one-vote in 1962, there is no constitutional justification for two legislative bodies.

Of course there are lots of interesting facts that would lead any reasonable person to question the need for our current system.

For example,

Did you know that California has about 30 million more people than Minnesota but has 81 fewer legislators?

I know that some people question a reduction in legislators.

But keep in mind that a reduction in the number of legislators will have absolutely no effect on representation or on a representative style of democracy. All areas of Minnesota—city suburban, and rural—will still have the same ratio of representation.

But enough of that.

We could spend months debating the merits of one system vs. another.

While I will be the first at the table for that debate, the only unicameral issue that the Legislature must decide in the next session is whether this is a reasonable initiative to put on the ballot.

I believe that is a no brainer.

If they come to St. Paul and vote on it quickly—like the first week of session—then we can begin the debate of which system is better.

I said at the beginning of this speech that technology and changing voter attitudes toward government gives us the opportunity to adapt our systems to a new era.

A single house legislature is one of those opportunities.

And when it come to the size, and the system, that our state will use to govern the people it only makes sense that—

The people should decide.

I'm a strong believer in our representative democracy.

We trust our elected leaders to make important policy and budgetary decisions for us, but this is a constitutional change that alters the very structure of our government.

This is a constitutional change in which there is an inherent conflict of interest for legislators.

This is your decision.

Last week I addressed the members of a House committee that will vote on a bill to let you decide this fundamental issue.

More than 600 citizens turned out to hear the debate.

At the end of my testimony, I took an informal poll of the audience. I asked all those who support a single house to raise their hands—about 2/3 went up.

Then I asked those who support our current two-house system to raise their hands—about a third went up.

Finally, I asked them to raise their hands if they thought that the people should NOT decide this issue—not a single hand went up.

It's clear to me that this is an issue that the people—regardless of their position—want to decide.

It's about empowering people and re-engaging you in your government.

From the beginning of my run for Governor I have been fighting a revolution against apathy.

For months during my campaign, I educated adults, (who had never voted) about:

- when the general election was,
- how they could register,
- and why they needed to care about participating.

In record numbers they showed up.

And of course we know what happened then.

Minnesotans came out to vote in record numbers. Why?

Because they believed that their vote would make a difference. And boy did it ever.

You know, if you ever start to think that your vote doesn't make a difference, well, think back about 18 months ago.

Who would have thought that 18 months later Jesse Ventura would be leading a Minnesota trade delegation to Japan?

It's interesting, when was in Japan I was meeting with a group of Japanese tourism executives and inviting them to have tour groups stop and see me when they are in Minnesota.

Of course I had to be honest with them. I said that when people travel to Minnesota these days I'm not so sure they are traveling to Minnesota to see me—I think it's more likely that they are traveling to Minnesota to see who the hell those people are that voted for Jesse Ventura!

But seriously, I believe that because of this last election, more and more people are believing that they can make a difference.

Today there are more voices than ever before debating tax policy, spending issues, and—yes—even something as weird-sounding as “unicameral.”

(Now when I go into grade schools I teach the kids a new word—U-n-i-c-a-m-e-r-a-l.)

And speaking of schools, it was very gratifying to me that this year we had more candidates for school board elections than in any time in recent memory.

People in St. Paul turned out in record numbers to vote against the stadium referendum.

And citizens are flocking to serve on state boards and commissions.

People are tuning in and we are better for it.

We have a great opportunity to engage Minnesotans in this important dialogue. What a better time than now—at the turn of the century and the beginning of a new millennium—to revisit how we govern.

No matter which system is deemed to be the best structure for serving the people, the wisdom of the voters will be revealed after a spirited debate next summer and fall.

In either case, we all win by focusing citizens back on their government in a creative, meaningful way.

While it's up to the Legislature to determine whether the people have the opportunity to participate in this important dialogue, it's far more up to you to put this issue on the ballot.

Talk to your legislators.

Tell them to "let the people decide."

Active, engaged citizens are critical to government reform.

While many politicians have written off half of all eligible voters, I will not give up.

Increasing voter turn out is just the start.

Citizens must participate in all aspects of government for democracy to thrive:

Vote. Volunteer in your community. Serve others.

Challenge conventional wisdom.

Speak your mind and offer ideas.

Pay attention to what's going on around you.

And seize every chance you have to ask your legislator to give you the chance to adapt our government to this new era of politics and a new millennium.

While I'm Governor, I will do my best to give you every opportunity to participate, but it is up to you to take full advantage of those opportunities to help rebuild our democracy.

Working together, we will not fail.

Thank you.