



# Summary of the Meeting with Al Quie

Civic Caucus

*Friday, September 30, 2005*

**A. Present:** Verne Johnson, chair (by phone); Chuck Clay, Jim Hetland, Clarence Shallbetter, Paul Gilje, and Al Quie, guest.

**B. Opening comments by Al Quie** —Jim introduced Al Quie, former Governor, Congressman and State Senator. Mr. Quie offered these thoughts:

**Need for term limits** —He would set a limit of 20 years for U.S. Senators and Congressmen. He thinks that efforts for a shorter limit are unrealistic.

**The importance of keeping responsibility and authority in elected officials at the state level** —Quie recalled when he was in the State Senate that he and Elmer Andersen after a bi-partisan Legislative Commission Study obtained legislative approval of a bill making it mandatory to educate the educable handicapped and providing funding. What happened in the Courts and in Congress in other situations illustrates the importance of elected state officials making decisions. In Pennsylvania the courts ordered that the educable handicapped be provided with education but money wasn't appropriated.

Congress itself has repeated the process by imposing mandates without money. Programs are *authorized* by the Congress, but it takes a separate action for a legislative body to *appropriate*. Thus Congress can appear to be taking action that is responsive to a problem, but the action is empty without the appropriation and forcing taxation in the States.

Moreover, he said, local school districts faced with federal mandates are forced to take money from other parts of education. Thus, the national government appears to be showing sympathy with an issue but in actuality is simply forcing the local authority to find the money by short-changing other programs.

**Interesting to remind ourselves who collects the taxes** —Income taxes are collected by the people and sent to the federal and state government. Sales taxes are collected by business and sent to the state government. Property taxes are collected by local governments that are closest to the people. Rules for expenditures are made far from the people in the use of the tax revenue that people and business have collected.

Quie recalled when he was growing up in the 1930s that the patient and doctor had a close relationship. The doctor charged the Quie family more because they could afford it, in order to make it possible for the doctor to treat the less fortunate. Giving another illustration, he recalled that traveling

hobos knew they could come to the Quie farm and receive help. When a hobo came for a meal, his dad insisted that the hobo be fed in the dining room—the room that the family used for meals only on special occasions like Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

**Respecting local decisions in a democracy** —Quie remembered that his first elected office was to a local school board. The school was about two miles by four miles. It had only five children, all of whom were sent to Nerstrand. At this time Minnesota had about 1,600 school districts. Quie was fresh from the US Navy and in college. He proposed that the school district be consolidated with Nerstrand. A referendum in his school districts was soundly defeated. Quie said he was the only person who voted yes. People turned out in droves to defeat the measure, even using tractors because of bad roads. He then spent the next year educating the community about the importance of their having a voice in the education of their children. That would only happen, he said, when they could be part of, and participate in elections, in the Nerstrand School District. The next referendum was widely approved, although by then many people didn't bother to vote. That's the way it is in a democracy, he said. Opposition stirs things up.

**The demagoguery in the media** —Unfortunately, he said, the media today seem to highlight the opposition to a proposal, irrespective of its validity. Opponents of good proposals know how to work the system and that "The only way I know I win is to make you lose."

**The importance of sympathetic listening** —He wishes that elected officials would listen to people both inside and outside their comfort zone with an attitude that "I might be wrong." Recalling his work with the handicapped, he said he received wisdom from the most interesting sources, namely the parents and the handicapped.

Quie recalled the vision that President Eisenhower had in proposing the Interstate highway system. He also mentioned the establishment of Dulles Airport, widely criticized because people thought that the location was too remote. We need to think out 50 years and even 100 years ahead.

**The value of political adversaries talking with one another** —Quie said that it's a myth that people in their last year of office are ineffective. Quie said his decision not to seek a second term as Minnesota governor was very beneficial. Surprisingly, he said, he became a leader that was listened to by both sides. He's a Republican. Roger Moe, the Senate majority leader, is a Democrat.

Moe attended a speech that Quie gave at the C-400 fund raising dinner at Concordia College in Moorhead. Quie decided not to give a typical speech on the states' budget problems but instead talked about the Holy Spirit guiding people. At the close of the meeting Moe came forward to the stage and shook hands with Quie. Quie said he sensed something had happened. He invited Moe to come to his office at the Capitol. Subsequently, Moe showed up at the office. Quie's staff wondered why he was there. Moe simply replied that the Governor wanted to see him. He and Moe listened to one another. They talked about principles. Moe, he said, had a good idea for solving a fiscal dilemma: one-third taxes, one-third program cuts, and one-third shifts and other "smoke and mirrors." Moe then carried this proposal through the Legislature.

**Changes in campaign funding** —Quie said that he'd change campaign funding so that campaign funds would have to come only from persons who live in the same jurisdiction. Every contribution would be immediately made public and be available on the Internet for everyone else to see. In the

case of Presidential campaigns, the only money a candidate could spend in a given state would be what the candidate raised from individuals in that state. No bundling by special interests.

**Electoral college changes** —He would change the winner-take-all approach that now exists in each state. In Minnesota, for example, the Presidential winner in a Congressional district would earn one electoral vote. He also would provide for two winner-take-all electors in the state. He opposes national direct election of the President because candidates would never spend any time in smaller states. They'd concentrate on California, Texas, Illinois, Florida, and New York.

**C. Discussion session** —During discussion with Quie, the following points were made:

**Conditions for reapportionment commissions** —Quie said he supports removing the decision on congressional and legislative districts from officials directly affected by the boundaries. He believes that the elected officials can lay down some principles to be followed by reapportionment commissions. For example, the principles could require a sense of geography and commonality of interest. He wouldn't give authority to judges without some protection.

**Whether democracy is performing well** —Quie said he agrees with the statement in our document that contends our democracy is facing serious problems. Asked whether his comments thus far today would make him a conservative Republican, Quie said he is cautious about just "getting the feds off our back." He mentioned that water and air flow from state to state. He definitely wants to get away from heavy regulation at the federal level.

**Changes in families and in other relationships** —There's less time today, he said, for families to sit together in interchange. He recalled the discussions his father led around the table at this farm. Also, he said, various workers and business people used to gather at the community cafe and talk things out. That is missing, too. Another example is that parents who place their children in pre-school day care don't have the opportunity to drop by at lunch and talk with one another and with their children.

**Low expectations in schools** —Quie bemoans the high drop out rate in some school districts. Teachers seem to have low expectations of their pupils in many such districts. Many citizens don't realize the impact that low expectations has on children.

**Importance of mediating organizations** —Quie is very active in prison ministry. He used that as an example of non-governmental organizations that can do much more than government.

**6. Other potential resource persons** —Peter Hutchinson, Tim Penny, Jean Bethke Elshtain of the University of Chicago, Mitch Pearlstein, Roger Moe, and State Senator David Hann.

**Get rid of endorsement for candidates** —Formerly, the conventions were open to people of all ideas. Now many delegates are single-issue. We're denying the people access to the process. The solution is to eliminate party endorsement.

**Combating special interest dominance** —Quie returned to his earlier point that requiring candidates to receive their funds only from citizens in the geographic area where they receive votes would go a long way to get rid of the influence of special interests.

**When referendums should be held** —Quie said that when there's legislative gridlock, he'd support a limited initiative-referendum process. He does not support the requirements for referendums in School Districts, especially for additional operating expenses. School Board members should have the authority to increase property taxes. Quie would have no problem with school boards making the decision if the school district fit the needs of the kids in the locality. He's less certain that such authority should exist in large school districts.

**Combating "pork" legislation** —Asked how he'd deal with issues such as the recent \$24 billion congressional package for transportation, Quie said he'd favor something similar to the bas-closing commissions. The commissions can recommend, with the Legislature making the final decision.

Quie said he personally avoided vote-trading in Congress. He more than once voted against a bill that contained his own amendment because he didn't like the overall bill.

**How to inform and educate our young people on government** —Quie agreed that it is a shame that children seem to get most of their information from television. Quie, said he has serious problems with "post-modern" thought that encourages thinking with your feelings. We need to work on increasing rational thought. Schools also ought to teach history without running it through social science.

**D. Thanks** —Jim thanked Quie for meeting with us.

***The Civic Caucus* is a non-partisan, tax-exempt educational organization. Core participants include persons of varying political persuasions, reflecting years of leadership in politics and business.**

**A working group meets face-to-face to provide leadership. They are Verne C. Johnson, chair; Lee Canning, Charles Clay, Bill Frenzel, Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland, John Mooty, Jim Olson, Wayne Popham and John Rollwagen.**