



Summary of Meeting with David Schultz

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle, Bloomington, MN 55437

Friday, November 10, 2006

Present : Verne Johnson, chair; Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland, Wayne Popham (by phone), and John Rollwagen

Guest speaker : David Schultz, professor, Graduate School of Public Administration and Management, Hamline University

A. Context of the meeting —As part of the Civic Caucus inquiry into the elections process and its impact on polarization and paralysis of the Legislature, today we are meeting with David Schultz, an expert on elections in Minnesota. He was invited to discuss the recent election and offer his thoughts on changes in elections that might be considered.

B. Introduction —Verne introduced Schultz, who is former chair of Common Cause, Minnesota. He has a Ph.D. in political science and a law degree from the University of Minnesota. He has authored 20 books. He is a nationally-recognized expert on political ethics, money and politics, political participation, and eminent domain law and has been a frequent commentator on television, radio, and in over 100 domestic and international newspapers and periodicals, including the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Schultz previously was a speaker at the Civic Caucus, in March 2006.

C. Comments and discussion on the recent election —In Schultz' comments and in the discussion the following points were made:

1. Not a tsunami or an earthquake —While control of state and federal lawmaking bodies shifted, the really significant aspect is that these bodies were closely divided in the past and still are. To illustrate his point, Schultz, offered these statistics:

a. pre-2006 election:

—7,333 state legislators in the 50 states, 3,655 Democrats, and 3,632 Republicans.

—Republicans controlled both houses of the Legislature in 20 states, and Democrats controlled both houses in 19 states.

—28 Republican Governors and 22 Democratic Governors

—Congress: House, 222 Republicans and 211 Democrats; Senate, 55 Republicans, 44 Democrats and one independent.

—Minnesota: House, 67 Republicans and 66 Democrats; Senate, 38 Democrats and 29 Republicans

b. post-2006 election:

—7,333 state legislators, with a switch of 275 seats, 4 percent of all seats, in the 50 states from Republican to Democrat.

—Democrats now control both houses of the Legislature in 23 states and Republicans, 10 states.

—28 Democrat governors and 22 Republican governors.

—Congress: House, 229 Democrats and 196 Republicans; Senate, 51 Democrats and 49 Republicans

—Minnesota: House, 85 Democrats, 49 Republicans; Senate, 44 Democrats and 23 Republicans

c. Summary —More than 85 percent of members of Congress were returned to office. There was a 6 percent shift of seats in the Senate and a 6.5 percent shift in the House. Only 4 percent of State Legislative seats throughout the nation changed hands.

2. Implications of the election —Schultz sees only marginal shifts in policy. The USA electorate is very closely divided, almost 50-50. He agreed that the election signified widespread concern over Iraq and the economy, but he doesn't see radical changes, such as a single payer health care system or nationalization of the airlines. The big change in Washington probably will be evident in the confirmation process, including Senate action on the appointment of John Bolton to the U.N. and on future Supreme Court appointments.

He said the Democrats in Congress over the next two years need to pass their agenda, let Bush veto what he chooses, and then fight it out in the 2008 elections.

3. States where one party controls both the House and Senate and the Governor— Schultz said about 18-20 states have the same party in control of the House, Senate and Governor.

4. Conservative Democrats elected —Looking at the defeat of Lincoln Chafee, a liberal Republican, to Sheldon Whitehouse, a conservative Democrat, in Rhode Island, Schultz said that election revealed that a Republican probably can't be elected in the Northeast. He also cited the defeat in Pennsylvania of conservative Republican Rick Santorum by conservative Democrat Bob Casey, who might be more conservative than Santorum on many issues. He also cited victories by Democrats in Western states like Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Arizona. These elections signal a movement to the right by Democrats. The election wasn't a vote on the Pelosi agenda; the Democrats didn't win, the Republicans lost.

5. Direction of top leadership in Minnesota Legislature —Schultz was asked to comment on the fact that the DFL caucuses in the House and Senate have elected leaders that aren't known for conservative views. Is this an exception to the national trend? Schultz said we need to see what kind of an agenda is presented to the Legislature in 2007. We'll then see whether polarization increases or decreases.

6. Most seats still safe —Despite the shift in control of legislative bodies, Schultz said that only about 50 of the 435 House seats in Congress and 35 of 134 House seats in the Minnesota Legislature were competitive. A Civic Caucus member commented that every seat that could be changed did change.

7. Suburban women deserted the Republican candidates —Suburban women left the GOP in droves in Minnesota, he said. If this is a longer term trend, it is a huge shift, he said. Amy Klobuchar ran a brilliant campaign. Early on, in August, she was running an ad urging that mothers be allowed to stay another day in the hospital after giving birth. That issue resonated very well with soccer moms. By the end of August she had a big lead over Mark Kennedy and never looked back. Women outnumbered men at the polls in Minnesota, 52-48 percent. Those women voted 56-44 Democrat.

Mike Hatch, he said, forfeited an excellent opportunity to attract the same group, by failing to effectively make use of Judi Dutcher, his running mate, a moderate who had left the GOP. But he chose a strategy that didn't use her presence and instead he concentrated only on his base. Schultz said he has faced Hatch in court and has a great deal of respect for him, but Hatch, he said, ran a very poor campaign. Fifty years ago one could run a campaign in Minnesota by appealing only to the base of people in your own party. That's not possible now. About 36 percent of Minnesotans are Democrat or leaning that way; about 35 percent are GOP or leaning that way. The rest are independent.

In the last debate among Hatch, Tim Pawlenty, and Peter Hutchinson, Pawlenty strategically gave liberal voters a reason to go to Hutchinson, rather than Hatch. But the really significant factor that helped elect Pawlenty was the vote in the sixth district for Michele Bachmann. As a conservative Republican she carried that district and brought Pawlenty along with her. Bachmann was able to paint Patty Wetterling as not supporting children. Wetterling overlooked an opportunity to really take advantage of the children issue. She did well against Mark Kennedy in the congressional race in 2004 by a simple message of measuring all public policy change on what it does for kids. She could have done that in 2006 but chose not to.

Back on the Governor's race, some persons wondered whether Pawlenty had more charisma than Hatch. Schultz said he's not in the group of people who sense that Pawlenty has a chance to make it on the national scene. Both in 2002 and in 2006 Pawlenty didn't attract a majority of voters. You need solid victories in your state to have a chance nationally, he said Others disagreed, noting that Pawlenty was the only survivor in a Democratic sweep.

8. Did evangelicals stay home? —Schultz wonders whether Republicans lost because many evangelicals were not satisfied with the Bush agenda and decided to stay home. Schultz believes people are concerned about moral values but that many of them don't believe the political process is the place to have their personal morality translated into public policy. Asked why Bachmann won in such a climate, Schultz said that her district probably has the highest concentration of conservative Roman Catholics and evangelicals in the nation and that enough of them came to the polls. The Republicans will not do well if they continue to appeal only to their evangelical base. Contrary to conventional wisdom, Schultz said that among evangelicals more are liberal than conservative. However, the conservative evangelicals have more visible spokespersons than the liberal evangelicals.

Continuing the discussion on religion and politics later in the meeting, Schultz said that some polarization results from people who believe they are doing God's will in taking certain positions. They are not open to compromise, an attitude that produces gridlock and paralysis. Without getting into the question of compromise or not, a member noted a great interest in young people in attending colleges with religious affiliation. Schultz said every college today is working to attract students because 10 years from now a 10-15 percent drop in number of 18-year-olds will occur.

9. An inevitable mid-term turnaround? —Schultz said facts don't support the common assumption that the out-of-power party always gains in the mid-term elections.

10. Democrats are the conservatives? —Schultz said he polled a group of 20-something people and discovered that most people thought of Democrats as being conservative. The reason was that Democrats were seen as trying to preserve Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, and protectors of the status quo are seen as conservative.

D. Comments and discussion on possible changes in elections— In Schultz' comments and in discussion the following points were made:

1. Reapportionment commission —This is a battle that can be won, although a good legislative leader in this area was lost with the retirement of Rep. Ron Abrams. Schultz believes action can occur by 2010, so the new system can be in place before the next reapportionment in 2011. A Civic Caucus member said a criterion of competitiveness needs to be part of the legislation.

2. Instant runoff voting —Schultz favors instant runoff voting. The group speculated about the impact of such a system had it been in effect for the governor's race in 2006. Under one scenario, the second choices from the Hutchinson supporters could have decided the election. But others noted that if instant runoff voting had been in effect before the campaign began then Hutchinson might even have won.

3. Reducing the impact of money in politics —Despite likely difficulties in making changes, campaign financing remains the most important area needing reform, Schultz believes. Asked which legislators would likely support changes, he singled out Rep. Steve Simon, Rep. Tom Emmer, and Sen. Dick Cohen.

4. Recommended improvements— To limit the impact of special interest money on political parties and legislative caucuses and improve the fairness of state political campaigns, Schultz recommends the following (in a January 24, 2005 memo):

—A \$500 limit on all political contributions to political parties and legislative caucuses.

—Limit to 20 percent in aggregate dollars as a percent of total contributions received that any political party, party unit, or legislative caucus may receive from lobbyists, political action committees or above-\$250 individual donors.

—Limit to \$2,000 per legislative race the total independent expenditures that parties and legislative caucuses could make.

—Regulate attack ads

—Immediate disclosure of all contributions and expenditures in excess of \$1,000.

5. Thanks —On behalf of the Civic Caucus, Verne extended sincere thanks to Schultz for meeting with us today.

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.

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