



# Summary of Meeting with John Marty

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle, Bloomington, MN 55437

*Friday, January 5, 2007*

**Guest speaker: State Sen. John Marty**, leading exponent for changes in elections, and chair, Health, Housing and Family Security Committee

**Present:** Verne Johnson, chair (by phone), Chuck Clay, Bill Frenzel (by phone), Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland (by phone), Jim Olson (by phone), Wayne Popham (by phone), Clarence Shallbetter (by phone)

**A. Context of the meeting** —Today's meeting is a continuation of the Civic Caucus inquiry into the relationship between the elections process and polarization and paralysis among lawmakers.

**B. Welcome and introduction** —Paul introduced State Sen. John Marty, a member of the Senate since 1987. Marty is a graduate of St. Olaf College with a B. A. in Ethics. The son of author and theologian Martin Marty, he is a former corporate foundation administrator and is a free- lance writer. He and his wife Connie have two children and live in Roseville.

**C. Opening remarks by Marty** —In his opening remarks Marty made the following points:

**1. Rebuilding of the Citizens League** —Marty said he had not been previously familiar with the Civic Caucus but he took note of the fact that many persons in the Civic Caucus have been active in the Citizens League for many years. Sean Kershaw seems to be doing an effective job of rebuilding the Citizens League, which is more needed now than ever before.

**2. Democracy seems to be getting weaker** —In some of our actions in the political process it's almost as if we are out to destroy democracy, not build it up. Political campaigns seem much too long. He noted that Sen. Mark Dayton no sooner had completed his six-year term in the U. S. Senate before he started talking about possibly running for Governor in four years. News coverage is getting weaker and weaker.

Using the recent House race between Michelle Bachmann and Patty Wetterling as an example, Marty said that the longer the race went on, the more you would think that neither should be elected, because of all the cheap attacks and misinformation being circulated. He attributes the negative campaigning to the explosion in availability of campaign funding.

Marty mentioned that he's now chair of the Senate Health Care Committee and that health care is ranked by many as the No. 1 issue in the state. However, he's bothered by the discussion that is taking place over the issue. Instead of having a rational discussion on all options, it seems as if the question of taxes can't be discussed in connection with what is done about health care.

**2. Clean up campaign nastiness** —Marty knows you can't interfere with free speech, but maybe something like the Minnesota News Council could be created: a body without ability to enforce its decisions, but with significant moral authority. Such a Council could be a watchdog during campaigns and highlight cheap shots that are being taken.

**3. Reform campaign finance** —In 2000, Marty said, as an example, George W. Bush defeated Elizabeth Dole for the GOP presidential nomination, not because he was more articulate or thoughtful, but strictly because he had ability to raise more money. The need for raising large sums of money discourages people from running for office.

**4. Change media coverage** —The main problem is all the emphasis on who is likely to win rather than covering the issues in the campaign. He realizes that problems are severe, that the owners of the Pioneer Press cut the news staff and that the future of the Star Tribune coverage is uncertain because of change in ownership. We have many more sources of information now than in the past but we aren't getting better information

**5. More corporate and non-profit responsibility** —He has observed the power of stockholders to prevent spending of corporate dollars for efforts that would help the environment and other well-being of the customer. Marty said that some kind of new corporate structure could be set up that would allow a corporation to invest dollars in the public good without threat of stockholder opposition.

**D. Discussion with Marty** —During the discussion with Marty the following points were raised:

**1. Validity of "cooperation" talk in Washington and St. Paul** —A member commented that lawmakers on both sides of the aisle in Congress and the State Legislature as well as the executive branch seem to be talking more about working together, not simply confrontation, nowadays. Marty replied that he, too, sees evidence of more cooperation. He said he's pleasantly surprised. In the past it has seemed as if people had as their chief objective to "stick it to the other side". There seems to be a genuine interest in trying to accomplish good legislation. He quoted one legislative leader who, in private with others of the same party, said, "Just because they're Republicans doesn't mean they don't have good ideas," - an attitude that was much less common in the recent past.

**2. Growing role of legislative caucuses in running campaigns** —Marty said he regrets the growing role of legislative caucuses in campaigns. He recalls that in 1993 the Legislature enacted changes in campaign finance but at the time, it wasn't politically feasible to limit the role of legislative caucuses, he said. Amounts spent by the legislative caucuses have grown considerably. He remembers that his own DFL Senate Caucus was spending about \$500,000 a few years ago. That number is now about \$2 million per campaign. In some cases as many as six mailings to voters in a district are being financed with this money.

Marty said he supports recommendations by David Schultz for limits on contributions to legislative caucuses and limits on spending by legislative caucuses on individual races.

Continuing his commentary on the growth in campaign finance, Marty cited the case of Paul Simon of Illinois who decided in 1996 not to run for the Senate, because he'd need to raise about \$6 million. In 2007 you'd need about \$20 million for such a race, Marty said.

Campaign financing is corrupting who candidates are and what they care about. Marty recalled a few sessions ago that a legislative staffer suggested that Marty change his position on a bill because of a large contribution made to the legislative caucus.

**3. Proposed campaign legislation to be introduced** —Marty said he will be introducing legislation that will provide more campaign financing. You can't stop big money from being contributed in independent expenditures, he said, but you can provide public money to the other candidate to offset those expenditures. He also will propose limits on legislative caucus spending.

**4. Possible changes in nominations process** —Marty said he supports recommendations originally made by the Growe commission a decade ago that would enable more candidates to receive party endorsement for the same office. All candidates receiving at least 20-30 percent support at a nominating convention, could be listed as endorsed by the party.

Marty reviewed situations where major lobbyist organizations endorsed against him. When Marty ran for Governor in 1994, organized labor supported another candidate that labor thought would be more supportive of the Prairie Island nuclear plant. The Teamsters never have endorsed Marty. Labor also has opposed Marty because of his opposition to public funds for stadiums, he said.

**5. Opposition to an earlier primary** —Marty disagrees with moving the primary date backwards because it would work against his objective to reduce the length of campaigns. Constitutionally, you can't stop candidates, but a short season between the primary and the general election promotes focus on the campaign. He recalled that in 1994 Arne Carlson beat the endorsed Republican candidate and then cleaned up on Marty in the general election. Four years later Skip Humphrey beat the endorsed DFL candidate in a tough race, yet despite a tough primary, he was still far ahead of the general election candidates in the late September polls. He didn't lose because of too little time between the primary and general. In fact, he would have had a better chance if the primary was closer to the primary. So Marty believes there is plenty of time between the primary and the general election.

**6. Potential of the single transferable vote (also known as instant runoff voting)**— A Civic Caucus member noted that the largest bloc of voters in Minnesota are independents. Wouldn't instant runoff voting be an asset, he asked? Marty replied that he has supported the idea for a long time and that he already had introduced a bill for instant runoff voting. He believes it would be an asset, not for the parties but for the process.

**7. Changes in redistricting?** —Marty said he favors shifting responsibility from the Legislature to a reapportionment commission. He's disappointed with the U. S. Supreme Court ruling on the Texas redistricting, because it could lead to other states' passing new redistricting legislation every time control of a legislative body shifts from one party to the other.

It was noted that next Friday the Civic Caucus will be meeting with Ed Cook of the Iowa Legislative Services Agency to discuss the Iowa approach to reapportionment. Marty recalled that some legislators in Iowa weren't happy with a recent redrawing of the legislative boundaries because in about one-third of the races incumbents were forced to run against one another.

In response to a question Marty said he doesn't think it is good that a Legislature, directly affected by reapportionment, should make the reapportionment decisions. The problem arises, he said, when you try to design a workable independent body.

**8. More single-issue groups?** —Marty said he has seen more single-issue groups in the past, but it still is a problem. He favors multiple party endorsement for the same office as a solution.

**9. Problem of big, last-minute, independent campaign contributions** —A member noted that in the last weeks of Minnesota's campaign for governor that large independent campaign contributions came in, seemingly almost out of nowhere. Marty repeated his suggestion that public financing should be available by the affected candidate to offset the efforts of the last-minute attacks financed by independent groups. He said that Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life and Education Minnesota, two large lobby groups, have opposed his proposals to bring in public financing on the other side, not because it would block their ability to get their message out, but because it would give the other side equal time. His proposal, he said, is designed to assure that all views are represented.

**10. "Earmarking" in spending bills** —Marty said the designation of spending to benefit a specific district or interest is far more prevalent at the federal than state level. He recalled, however, while he was sitting on a conference committee, that a proposal suddenly appeared for \$2 million in tax breaks for Northwest Airlines was on the table; no one would take responsibility for arguing in favor of the idea, but it passed by a two-thirds vote.

**11. Process as chair of Health Committee** —Marty was asked how he plans to conduct himself as chair of the important Health Committee in the Senate. He said he goes out of his way to run a fair committee and be responsive to all members, irrespective of party.

**12. Growing tendency to place taxes and appropriations in the state constitution** —It was noted that the Legislature last session submitted a constitutional amendment (adopted by the voters) to dedicate a portion of sales tax receipts to transportation and that another dedication—this time for outdoors—will be pursued aggressively in this session. Marty said he agrees that it is not good policy to put such legislation in the constitution. He said that last year he agreed reluctantly to support the outdoors amendment if it dealt only with dedicating new money (e.g. an increase in the sales tax) and that it benefits a general area, not specific interests. However, he would not have supported the final bill under consideration, and believes that if we need more money for a certain part of the budget, legislators should have the courage to vote for more funding and the taxes to pay for it, not duck their responsibility by putting funding in the constitution.

**13. Potential legislative interest in more accountability for transportation spending** — It was noted that the Legislature has not seemed to concern itself with whether a transportation improvement will reduce congestion or not, but rather that transit and highways will each get its share, irrespective of the impact on congestion. Marty replied that he is a skeptic of LRT because he fears the investment will undercut the bus system. He would much prefer investing transit dollars in reducing fares,

possibly down to 25 cents a ride, to increase riders. More riders should be the measurement of effectiveness, he said. During the discussion reference was made to a 2003 report of the Civic Caucus. Marty asked that a copy of the report be given to him.

**14. Changes in the Metropolitan Council?** —Marty is concerned that at one time there were nine developers appointed to the Metropolitan Council. He's not opposed to an elected Metropolitan Council, but he'd rather like to see the seven counties merged into one, so you don't add another elected group on top of the counties.

**15. Move to appointment of judges** —Marty believes recent court decisions threaten the independence of the judiciary, because candidates for judgeships now can be endorsed by, and financed by, political parties. Marty said he is impressed with the consistent high quality of non-partisan appointments of judges by Minnesota governors when vacancies occur between elections. To protect the independence of the judiciary he would favor having judges be appointed in Minnesota rather than elected. He would prefer possibly six-year terms.

**16. Thanks** —On behalf of the Civic Caucus, Verne Johnson thanked Marty 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.**

**[Click Here](#) to see a biographical statement of each.**