



# Summary of Discussion with Lori Sturdevant

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle, Bloomington, MN 55437

*Friday, June 5, 2009*

**Present:** Dan Loritz (Chair); David Broden, Marianne Curry, Paul Gilje, Jan Hively (phone), Verne Johnson (phone), Tim McDonald, John Mooty, Wayne Popham (phone), Chuck Slocum

**A. Context of the meeting** -This summer the Civic Caucus will begin a process of planning for its future, discussing the condition of Minnesota and the state's future concurrently with what role the Civic Caucus might play. Today's guest, Star Tribune columnist Lori Sturdevant, has been invited to share her thoughts on the future of Minnesota: its challenges and opportunities.

**B. Welcome and introductions—Lori Sturdevant** , editorial writer and columnist, with the Star Tribune, was born in South Dakota and has spent most of her life in Minnesota and with the Star Tribune. She is widely respected for her objective reporting on politics and public affairs. She also has edited two biographies, on Elmer L. Andersen and W. Harry Davis. She currently is working on a history of the Pillsbury families in Minnesota, from 1855 to the present. "The capitalists that came from New England and built this state were in pursuit of money, but that was a means to an end. They were also politically and socially-minded," Sturdevant said of the Pillsbury book.

**C. Comments and discussion** -During comments by Sturdevant and in discussion with the Civic Caucus, the following points were raised:

**1. "Bullish on Minnesota"**— "Coming from the Dakotas, (Former Governor) Elmer Andersen was an adult convert to Minnesota, and so am I." Sturdevant proclaimed herself an optimist by nature, and "bullish on Minnesota."

A running thought of hers for a decade now, she said, has been this: Can a state that was reliant on natural resources at its founding, and human capital in recent years, still compete? Our position as an exceptional state is sliding. Yes, she determines, but not without renewed vision and energy.

**2. Changing demographics** —The population is aging, with a large and well-educated work force being replaced by a group that is smaller and less-educated, with a larger proportion of minorities that are not doing well in school.

An aging population is a benefit, she said. We need to tap the human capital of retiring adults for purposes of volunteering. And it's not good enough for us to say, 'Just read a book to a child'...we

now know there is a *right* way to read a book to a child, so that it has the best results. There should be sound programs of training for volunteers, too.

**3. Federal government to solve health care expense problem?** —The rising costs of health care are pressing the budgets of business, and the state. It looks like the federal government may solve the problem, Sturdevant said. "The Reagan notion that government is the problem, not the solution, is fading."

**4. Governor's race providing rare opportunity for a 2009-2010 on state issues** —This week Governor Pawlenty announced he would not be seeking a third term, opening the Republican field to a rapidly-expanding list of possible candidates.

"This will be the first time," Sturdevant observed, "since 1914 that we have had a governor's race stand on its own; without a U. S. Senate race, without a Presidential race, and without an incumbent Governor." It provides a remarkable opportunity for Minnesotans to focus on the position of the state, and to think on competing messages for its future. Again she emphasized: "We need to get past the notion that government is the problem, and get good, efficient government."

As an "insider," a member asked; as someone who has followed politics at the capitol for many years, what qualities do you look for in a governor?

The guest responded that she seeks a visionary who can speak to the people of Minnesota frankly about the state's challenges, and then be flexible about tactics to go about addressing them. Governor Pawlenty has taken no-taxes to the level a holy principle, which, she said, is not good for the state.

**5. Media role diminishing in campaigns** —A question: What is the role of the media in describing qualities in a candidate? Media are changing, Sturdevant said, and their role is diminishing. Leaders now more than ever need to be their own communicators. Social media will be important; having a social network. How would you design a campaign? Like Obama did, she said, with heavy emphasis on the Internet. How do you communicate challenging ideas through social media, which has at its essence short bursts of communication? Repetition, iteration, and constant communication, she replied.

**6. Urgency of adding jobs to the state's economy** —On the economy, a member noted that the coming budget gap in 2011 is estimated at \$6.5 billion, up about \$2 billion from this biennium. Cutting and taxing will not be enough. How badly do we need to add more jobs to the state, to increase revenue?

We have to be picking up job growth, Sturdevant insisted. Minnesota has always been sluggish here, though she noted that while other states were roaring with the housing bubble Minnesota held back—and our unemployment crash has been less severe. But we need more jobs.

Under Governor Perpich we had one model of an activist-governor with a bag of tricks that he used to attract employers. Under the current administration things are too *laissez-fair*. We need probably to have something somewhere in the middle.

**7. Importance of bio-tech developments** —"The bio-tech investments at the University of Minnesota will be remembered as the greatest thing of this decade," Sturdevant said. The Governor's unallotment may put pressure on the project. With higher education one of the Governor's target areas to balance the budget, it could be difficult to provide funding for the project. It was suggested the Civic Caucus might plan a session specifically on the bio-tech development

**8. Decline of corporate leadership** —A member asked about the decline of corporate leadership in the civic affairs of the state, from the encouragement of employee volunteerism to sitting on boards and donating money.

Banks used to be very local, Sturdevant observed, but now are essentially franchises. But the problem is not insurmountable. We still have institutions: foundations, universities, faith-based organizations. What used to be done in a room at the Minneapolis Club is now done more democratically, and that's a good thing.

We have a marketing problem, a member said; we are apologetic more than we are leading. "That's our culture," Sturdevant agreed.

**9. Need for widespread use of volunteers** —It's not only about money, said a member, but about people-power. Of the 1 million kids in the state 400,000 don't have someone looking out for their development in the way they need to become successful. We have many times that number in retirees. A \$35 billion state budget can't solve all problems, Sturdevant asserted. A caucus member suggested an idea for the new Governor might be an office of volunteerism/mentorship. Another member said that some governmental units in Minnesota have not welcomed volunteers.

**10. Broader political participation needed to address extreme partisanship?** —A member asked how Sturdevant feels about the extreme partisanship in the state. Does she have a theory as to the cause, or how to change it? Is it the caucus system for endorsing candidates?

There is a lot that can be done with what we have got, she replied. Caucuses, for example, need broader participation. She would like to see the changes suggested by the Growe Commission, 1995, <http://archive.leg.state.mn.us/docs/2005/other/050564.pdf>, but doesn't think that will happen. "We need to swamp caucuses with ordinary people."

"It is tempting to paint Republicans and Democrats with a broad brush," Sturdevant warned, "but Democrats have come a long way. They have evolved because they want to win. Democrats can put forth a moderate candidate; not so sure about the Republicans."

**11. Future of Ranked Choice Voting(Instant Runoff Voting)** —What does the guest think about Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) ? We have-the Star Tribune has-wanted to see a test of IRV, she said. This is a difficult election to do so, with the Parks Board in Minneapolis uniquely challenging to execute with an instant runoff process.

**12. Role of the Civic Caucus?** —In closing, a member asked Sturdevant to lend her wisdom, briefly, to the role of the Civic Caucus going forward. "I would encourage the Civic Caucus to speak out more.

You are the Citizens League of the earlier generation," both literally (in the core group), and through its processes. "You are still pitching ideas, which is very important. Do more idea-generating, and advertise that you do this...Serious people take the Civic Caucus seriously."

**13. Thanks** —On behalf of the Civic Caucus, Loritz and others thanked Sturdevant for meeting with us today.