



Ned Crosby and John Hottinger - Minnesota Citizens' Assembly Proposal

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle #920, Bloomington, MN 55437

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Present: Verne Johnson (Chair); David Broden, Janis Clay (phone), Paul Gilje, Christina Gillette (Jefferson Center), Jim Hetland (phone), Scott Hvizdos (Jefferson Center), Tim McDonald, Arason Parkman (Jefferson Center), Wayne Popham (phone), Clarence Shallbetter, Bob White

Summary of Crosby and Hottinger comments: Ned Crosby and John Hottinger propose a new citizen based organization be created to help address Minnesota's structural problems with its state budget. Crosby and Hottinger propose a randomly-selected, 1,000-person Minnesota Citizens Assembly, carefully selected by age, education, gender, geographic location, race and political attitudes. A citizens "jury" would be selected from this pool to hold hearings, highlight budgetary issues and propose solutions to the Governor, the Legislature, the Citizens Assembly and to people throughout the state. Large financial contributions would be sought for a statewide communications effort.

A. Welcome and introductions- Ned Crosby has pursued a career in public affairs, concentrating on democratic reforms. He received a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Minnesota in 1973. In the process of writing his thesis, he invented the Citizens Jury process, and in 1974 he founded the Jefferson Center to research new democratic processes.

Crosby helped to create Operation De Novo in Minneapolis, was president of the board of the Minneapolis Legal Services in the early 1970s, was chair of the Carolyn Foundation in the late 1990s and has worked on human rights issues in Africa and Central America. He has worked both in civic affairs in Minnesota and with organizations serving in the third world. He taught high school classes in the early 1970s, a year at Augsburg College, a semester at Yale in 1994 and a graduate seminar at the University of Minnesota in 2008.

On August 1, 2010 Crosby delivered the keynote address "Direct Democracy - and Authentic Voice of the People" at the Global Forum on Modern Direct Democracy in San Francisco.

John Hottinger is president of Hottinger Consulting LLC. An attorney and former state senator in Minnesota, he served as assistant majority and majority leader, and chaired health and human resources and early childhood subcommittees. He is a former officer and chair of the Council of State Government. Hottinger is the Chair of the Executive Committee of the Northstar Chapter (Minnesota) of the Sierra Club and works with a number of other nonprofits involved in poverty reduction, early

childhood education and government reform. In 2011 he will open a firm to provide mediation, arbitration and policy development services.

B. Comments and discussion -During Crosby and Hottinger's visit with the Civic Caucus, the following points were raised:

Dealing effectively with Minnesota's long-term budget crisis

Crosby opened by highlighting the importance of resolving Minnesota's long-term budget crisis. The Jefferson Center believes there will not be a sound solution to the budget unless there is an informed will of the people to back up any decisions made. "We believe our Minnesota Citizens Assembly is the best way to do this. Too much attention has been paid to suggestions about how to change the budget itself and not enough to how to develop strong public support to back the legislature in making the tough choices needed."

It will be increasingly difficult for a majority of voters to understand the budget context. There have been short-term solutions for decades, Hottinger said, "and I'm as guilty of this approach as others."

A participant asked how to promote long-term solutions. Hottinger observed that there are many groups out there doing coordination and communications efforts with the public but it has usually been the same group of people that show up.

Components of the Minnesota Citizens Assembly

The Minnesota Citizens Assembly (MnCA) is a major new method designed to create an informed political will. Built upon the model of the Citizens Jury process (invented in Minnesota and now used around the world) and the Citizens' Assembly, introduced in British Columbia in 2004, the MnCA aims to build strong support among a majority of Minnesota voters for major policy initiatives.

What makes the MnCA different is a very large public relations budget to insure that the work done by a core group of citizens is understood by the broader public.

The main steps of the MnCA are:

1. Gather a "jury pool" by randomly selecting about 1,000 people, stratified to be a microcosm of Minnesota in terms of age, education, gender, geographic location, race and political attitudes.
2. From this jury pool, select a core group of 50 to 75 people who will attend hearings to look closely at the key decisions needed in order to deal effectively with Minnesota's long-term budget crisis. They will be paid \$150 a day for their services to insure that those accepting are not simply students, the retired and the unemployed.
3. This core group will meet on three-day weekends, with three or four weeks between each meeting. They will hear from a variety of experts on key aspects of the programs such as health care and education that make up the major part of Minnesota's budget. Such hearings may take place over the better part of a year.
4. After each meeting there will be a major public relations effort, using earned media, social networking and paid TV ads to inform the rest of the state. Something like \$500,000 should be spent after each meeting on this effort.

5. As the project advances, the Legislature will be asked to follow the same steps as the MnCA in dealing with long-term budget problems.
 1. The Legislature will be willing to adopt this new approach only if a majority of the public clearly wants it.
 2. A major political action committee must be held in reserve to encourage legislative participation.

The MnCA can inform the Minnesota budgeting process

The Jefferson Center, Hottinger said, is devoted to advancing the informed will of the people. To resolve the budget problems tough choices must be made. We are seeing this now with Obama's compromise with the Congress on tax cuts. The goal is to find a way to get a new understanding-core public support-of necessary actions that is broad enough to 'give cover' to legislators. "The public doesn't trust the media anymore and doesn't trust politicians anymore-but they may pay attention to their peers."

Crosby pointed out, "After World War II, Churchill always said that things were done too little, too late. We want to avoid that. This is about citizen involvement and the understanding that we cannot just push more and more money into the government to solve all our problems,"

In the days of Minnesota as a 'state that worked,' the voters could and would speak directly to the legislature. More and more interest groups are participating now, making that more difficult. To streamline that direct communication, the Citizens Assembly would be created to represent a microcosm of the public, a 50- to 75-person sample selected from a larger pool of 1,000.

Aspects of the Citizens Jury model have been used before

The Citizens Jury process has been used over 30 times in the United States, most recently during the summer of 2009 in Minnesota, when Rep. Laura Brod and Secretary of State Mark Ritchie sponsored a project on election recounts. The process has been used over 300 times in Britain since 1996 and is now used in Australia. Crosby conducted a demonstration of the Citizens Jury in 2005 at a conference in Perth, Australia, where it was voted the most effective deliberative method for dealing with a variety of issues.

In 2009 the Oregon legislature passed a bill authorizing up to three projects, modeled on the Citizens Jury process, to evaluate Oregon ballot initiatives in November 2010. Two projects were conducted in August 2010, and the results of each were placed in the official voters' pamphlet sent out to all voters by the Oregon Secretary of State.

In 1993 a Citizens Jury addressed the Minnesota budget. Conducted in cooperation with Tom Stinson, the jury exhibited quite extraordinary diversity, with Vin Weber bringing in conservative witnesses and someone from the liberal side introducing opposing ideas. "We assumed some of the folks around the table would never interact," but they ended up having wonderful conversations. "It was only on the fourth day that they really began to trust that we weren't running some game on them." On the fifth day they voted overwhelmingly for a tax hike to resolve the budget problem.

It was a bit too idealistic-not practical. "That is why we need to have the 'outer' groups-to tone them down if they get too extreme."

Hottinger described directing a citizens' jury two years ago on election reform. The citizens' recommendations included some things that were ultimately vetoed by the governor. Many of the recommendations coming forth this year were developed by a citizens' jury, but our speakers are not certain how direct the jury's impact was.

Beginning the process

A participant asked the speakers what is stopping them from running the process now? Crosby replied that this is going to cost as much as a major new public building. "The first step with raising the money will be to have the policy community on board. At that point we need to get the civic leaders and philanthropists to recognize this 'in their head and their hearts.'"

The speakers noted that the 1,000-person jury pool must be constantly renewed, and a political action committee assembled.

A member asked how they plan to publicize statewide? Crosby replied, "We are still in the planning stages, but in the past we have gone around the state using different methods. We will need to use a very sophisticated strategy to maximize presence in the social, earned and purchased media."

Having influence at the Legislature

In the meantime, interest groups will continue to be active, a participant observed-they will continue to press their agendas. Another asked the speakers how would they see the MnCA having a comparable effect at the Legislature.

Hottinger replied he thinks it will take a concerted effort of public outreach during the conduct of the MnCA. In the rural areas the lobbyists have already formed outposts. "But the PAC will need to act like a PAC. There is no mistake about that."

The speakers have a sense of urgency given the seriousness of the state's situation and are concerned that we are reaching a tipping point. However, The Jefferson Center has been at this for 30 years, so they have a viable process already developed.

Crosby and Hottinger are aware that it will be a significant challenge to raise funds for this effort. They point out, however, that capital campaigns of \$50 million or more are common in Minnesota. Their challenge to Minnesota's civic leaders is:

Ø What is more important to the future of Minnesota than dealing effectively with our long-term budget crisis?

Ø Can you think of any better way to mobilize an informed political will to support the tough choices that the legislature needs to make?

Ø If a better method exists, use it. If the MnCA proves to stand the best chance of creating the informed political will needed, then fund it at the level of \$20 to \$30 million.

What makes the MnCA unique?

"It is not a town hall meeting," Hottinger said. "I gave up on those as a legislator because they were futile exercises. The same people would show up all the time, often recruited by activists. It rarely reflected the views of the bulk of the community.

"This process is scientific: We assemble a jury list of up to 1,000, weight it well, based upon a variety of factors, and then select a citizen jury from that list. We're very proud of this. People who have been skeptical at first have watched us operate the selection process, and have become very convinced" of its quality.

Term limits affect institutional memory

A participant asked the speakers how they feel about term limits and career legislators.

Hottinger replied that what seems to occur when there are term limits is that you lose institutional memory, and thus increase the power of lobbyists and staff. "I don't think (term limits) play a significant role" at improving governance," he said.

C. Closing

The next step will be to gather an advisory council in Minnesota to help building this effort. As the Gold Medal Flour Company would say-you'll try their flour eventually, why not now? So: "Why not now?"