Nonpartisan, small unicameral legislature works in Nebraska; questions arise here

Editor's note: In 1987, the Journal's contributing editor, Ted Kolderie, arranged for Minnesotans interested in the idea of a unicameral legislature to talk with a visiting friend from Nebraska, who was familiar as a lobbyist with the nation's only one-house legislature. Kolderie has now updated that discussion after conversations with Richard Brown, deputy clerk in the Nebraska Unicameral, and Richard Herman, who covered the Unicameral for the Lincoln Journal and who chaired the constitutional revision commission from 1995 to 1997. What follows is the updated version, incorporating the ideas of all three sources.

Nebraska is a fairly normal American state, which simply happens to have this curiosity in its government. The capital is at Lincoln, and the Capitol—itsel a marvelous building—is one of those prairie towers actually completed with two legislative chambers just before the change to a unicameral.

The idea of a one-house legislature was considered in Nebraska, but not adopted, in 1919. It surfaced again in 1934 in the Depression. And when the Legislature failed to address the question the proposal was raised by initiative petition. George Norris was one of its strong proponents. Though by that time in the U.S. Senate, Norris got deeply involved with this "local" issue. He seems to have been interested mainly in the nonpartisan (rather than one-house) idea. He did, though, have—from his days in Nebraska and from his experience in the Senate—a strong aversion to the conference committee, which reinforced his interest in the one-house feature. The measure appeared on the statewide ballot in the fall of 1934, along with proposals to legalize horse-racing and the sale of beer, and won handily. A number of its characteristics bear on the institution's performance.

- It is small, the smallest in America. The 1934 constitutional amendment set the size as a range, between 30 and 50. For a long time the Unicameral had 43 members. Currently there are 49. That is not very many. A few members serve a long time; some seats turn over rapidly. In '99 there were 10 new members, a 20 percent turnover.

- Its members are relatively low-paid in comparison to members

Continued on page 6

Cramer seeks strong partnerships

by Dana Schroeder

When Steve Cramer takes over as executive director of the Minneapolis Community Development Agency (MCDA) on June 28, he won't be changing so much the type of work he does as the scale and geographic area in which he does it.

Cramer has worked at the nonprofit Project for Pride in Living (PPL) for five and a half years, the last two and a half as its executive director.

"The focus at PPL is on the core neighborhoods, with a heavy emphasis on housing," he said in a recent interview.

"The MCDA has a broader mission," Cramer said. "We need to care about the inner-city neighborhoods, but must also be concerned about the riverfront, downtown and the more affluent neighborhoods." He said the city has come to realize that it won't outcompete with places like Lakeville by making vast quantities of land available for development. "Our advantage is our urbanism," he said. "We must build on the diversity and 'urbanness' of the city."

Cramer sees the three main issues he will face at MCDA as the agency's
Beyond money and good intentions: Redesigning public services

Viewpoint by Lyle Wray

Star Tribune (May 10) Gov. Ventura's budget proposal could follow former Finance Commis-

sioner Wayne Simonson's advice about the mundane, not more dramatic, part of the creation of a new system. “—N. Machiavelli

Red Wing Republican-Eagle (May 17), “For all the talk of tripa-

risanship, and Ventura's statement to cut spending to meet the new fiscal polar-

align of the state's success. “—Lonnie L. Smith

One is left wondering why large bureaucracies would turn themselves upside down to provide more effective solutions to significant public challenges in education and other areas.”

Governor, lawmakers win most praise for session

On Balance

"It must be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to plan, more uncertain to execute, nor more dangerous to administer, than the creation of a new system."—N. Machiavelli"


### TABLE 1: SHARES OF SELECTED PROPERTY-TAX COMPONENTS, RESIDENTIAL HOMEOWNER VS. BUSINESS PROPERTY CLASSES, TAXES PAYABLE IN 1997 AND 1998 (EST.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Class</th>
<th>Market Value</th>
<th>Tax Capacity</th>
<th>Net Taxes</th>
<th>Tax Rate</th>
<th>Market Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td>173,959,000</td>
<td>13,233,904</td>
<td>2,114,152</td>
<td>1.23%</td>
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### TABLE 2: SHARES OF SELECTED PROPERTY-TAX COMPONENTS, RESIDENTIAL HOMEOWNER VS. BUSINESS PROPERTY CLASSES, TAXES PAYABLE IN 2000 (EST.)

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### Table Continued

**Property Tax**

Continued from page 1

after a well-documented couple of decades in which Minnesota moved further and further from an accountable property-tax system. (Documentation is available from the Minnesota Taxpayers Association.) The Latimer Tax Study Commission recommended specific measures of property-tax reform in 1984 that set the stage for further action. Gov. Perpich in 1989 over- saw the enactment of legislation which included at least one major recommendation of the Latimer commission: elimination of the homestead credit. Gov. Carlson broached the idea of a fair and equitable property-tax reform proposal in the first months of his administration in 1995, but went nowhere that year. For many, “reform” simply means “lower the cost of local services to the resident.” What is reform? In light of the background summary above, how did property-tax reform fare as a result of the 1999 session? In a word—mixed. Most of the tax-law writers achieved in the last three years—through the education homestead credit and lower general education levy—is the recognition of the increasing reliance on state funding. Although there is some (if not yet enough) movement now versus flexibility given to local school boards to decide how to spend the state aid. Funds should be raised by the jurisdiction responsible for the spending, but the trend in Minnesota is just the opposite.

### Levy Limits

Levy limits were extended for cities and counties through taxes payable in 2000. Legislators still feel this is necessary to ensure that property-tax limits will be noticed by taxpayers. Ideally, city and county responsibilities would be clarified and rates sufficiently compressed so that local government would have more fire to levy whatever they want to fulfill local spending needs.

### Further Study

Funding for another Tax Study Commission was considered during the legislative session but did not survive the conference committee to make it into law. However, the Governor has directed the Department of Administration to do a review of all tax systems in order to recommend specific reforms for the 2001 legislative session. It is clear from the lack of reform in the 1999 session that there will be plenty of room for recommendations.

Lynd Reed is research director of the Minnesota Taxpayers Association, which can be reached at 651-224-7477.

"A mixed bag!"
I’ve always been a backers of LRT,” he said. “The potential for development for is there. The market will demand it, but we can plan and be ready to act.”

Commercial nodes
Cramer said neighborhood commercial nodes are another citywide priority. Cramer added that the city, with property prices increasing along Lake Street and Franklin, Broadway and Central Avenue, has one of the highest priorities by the city council and the mayor.

He said it may not work to expect continuous commercial development in one location but he believes the city should encourage strong development at various locations. He expects that development will flow from there.

Cramer thinks it’s tougher to bring about development at the smaller commercial nodes in neighborhood settings. “Neighborhoods strengthen nodes and nodes strengthen neighborhoods. “Neighborhoods strengthen commercial nodes in neighborhoods and commercial nodes in neighborhoods and commercial nodes in neighborhoods,” he said. “I’ll have a chance to keep working with this organization and others like it.”

Dana Schneider is editor of the Minneapolis Journal.

Unicameral

There will be serious discussion in Minnesota this year about convert- ing the Legislature to unicameral form. A nonprofit organization—Min- neapoLis Citizens League—has been formed, cochaired by two former state sena- tors, Paul Homan (DFL-HHOUSE) and Gene Merriam, a DFLer. It has a one-room office at 701 First Avenue North (www.marineleague.com), a web site—www.singlehouse.com), Chuck Slocom, earlier a Republican party chair, is now organizing the effort, contacting editors, etc. Money is being raised in $25,000 and $50,000 chunks, Pillsbury Bills. Gov. Ventura is expected to back it. Wendy Heyen, his director of government relations, visited Nebraska this spring.

The change would require amend- ing the Minnesota state constitu- tion. Minnesota has no initiative process, so the Legislature must act to change the constitution to the change on the ballot. Bills for this have been introduced. HF 195 and SF 3.4 Points. One sponsor is House Speaker Steve Stiversgav and state Sen. Scott Dibble, DFL-Minneapolis, who single strike all references to the proposal in the constitution by its author. The League committee that produced the report used the 1984 legislative session as a case study of how to improve the decision-making process and procedures of the Minnesota Legislature.

At that time the League did not identify “problems of sufficient magni- tude to support a movement to adopt an unicameral Legislature.” Critical was the lack of any movement to get a referendum on the issue. And given the “lack of an institutional change on the part of the electorate the League concluded a unicameral body was not immediately achievable. At that time, the League said it was more important to improve the decision-making process and procedures of the Minnesota Legislature.

The Citizens League last looked at the How is there time to draft a bill, how to get them done in the 10-day time? We have a fairly inten- sive daily press conference and that is where the discussion on the voting during the session on substantive bills. Groups tend to form re-form from issue to issue.

A to process:

• all introductions are pretty much fixed to the 1st week. In 1999 about 880 bills were intro- duced; 313 were enacted. All sub- stantive bills must be heard in a bill. A bill goes only to one com- mittee. If a bill would spend state money, the rules require the commit- tee to attach an appropriations measure that funds the new program (for instance, L57 and S75(Appropriations).

• When it comes time to act on a bill, the committee goes into executive session. The feeling is that at least one senator will understand that the bill must be able to talk candidly. The public does not attend, lobbyists do not. The senator may report the decision to approve or not. But, I must say I’ve seen at least one case where the bill is print- ed a few days later. A bill coming out of committee goes to the floor as introduced by its author. The first action is then to adopt, or not adopt the bill. Proposals are then introduced by the author.

• On the floor a bill is considered and may be amended twice. This procedural check-and-balance is to see the structure, it’s mis- ing in a one-house legislature. Structurally, Nebraska’s legislature is a unicameral; functionality, Nebraska’s legislature is unicameral but it’s a bicameral. A bill comes up first in the House, Pass the committee. The Speaker, the chair of the Executive Board and the chairs of the standing commis- sions then, at least one day, it moves on as a whole to the House of Representatives. There appears something like caucuses, but, again, there are not many of them. Nebraska has its own version of bill, which is similar to a House. The bill is a House, version of the Senate. Nebraska. In Nebraska every even-numbered year, there is a unicameral session.

How important is the size? Size is probably the most important ele- ment of a workable legislative process. It simplifies the internal communication. Electoral change is reflected quickly. But it affects what the legislation is. Some say we pro- bably have enough to get things done in a unicameral of 49 members: A small group can hold legislation, if it is very determined.

The fear is that if you reduce the size too much, you will shrink too much that all public

no caucuses there’s, of course, no caucuses. The institutional staff has five divisions: (a) the clerk’s desk hand the bills, the bill dis- tribution, lobbyist registration information; (b) eight attorneys base draft bills; (c) a research division with a library, researches legislative issues and impacts; (d) a fiscal sec- retary with an economist and two analysts; (e) an ombudsman, also used by the senators, hears citizen com- plaints about agencies. The Uni- cameral has a web site: (www.unicameralstate.org).

Nebraska does have make-laws with the unicameral. How does it work? What does it cost to get elected? Money is raised the normal way: PACs; a political action committee.

No other state has gone to unici- cameral. How secure is it in Minnesota? There is no movement to abolish it. Periodically there is a movement to make it partisan. Nebraska is not really that successful. My own sense is simply that it is very diffi- cult any longer to find any real interest groups, lobbyists, and now the courts have thrown out any kind of representation other than population.

Legislators are well paid. Nebraska has a one-house legislature. The sessions are not long, but, again, there are not many of them. Nebraska has its own version of the House floor. The bills are usually treated well; but, again, there are not many of them. Nebraska has its own version of the House floor. The bills are usually treated well; but, again, there are not many of them. Nebraska has its own version of the House floor. The bills are usually treated well; but, again, there are not many of them. Nebraska has its own version of the House floor. The bills are usually treated well; but, again, there are not many of them.
Bus route competition lowers fares in Armenian city

"Competition Reduces Rates on Some Minibus Routes in Yerevan." So read the headline in the April 26, 1999, Aragil Electronic News Bulletin in the former Soviet republic of Armenia. Originally from the Armenia Republic newspaper, the story indicated that as a result of competition, the rates have dropped on certain routes in Armenia's capital city, Yerevan. The transportation costs on several routes have dropped in half, from 100 to 50 drams—which is now equal to the amount that the ordinary and less convenient bus charges. Today, 101 microbus routes are operating in Yerevan, serving virtually every corner of the city.—Lyle Wray.

All those new parking ramps popping up around downtown Saint Paul have been puzzling a friend, who remembers the policy in Minneapolis to keep new ramps in a belt around the central business district. The city is also trying to add back on-street parking.

"Are city people sure...really sure...downtown streets can handle the traffic those ramps create?" a friend asked a senior person in Saint Paul public works recently.

The city official looked at our friend for a while. "No," he said.—Ted Kolderie.

Rail advocates have long argued that the Twin Cities region needs to follow the lead of other cities by building LRT. But let's hope we don't follow too closely. The Seattle Times reports that the cost for building a light-rail line from Seattle to SeaTac has gone up by "hundreds of millions of dollars." Transit officials there are scrambling to find a way to cut costs to get back down to the project's $1.8 billion budget. Options being considered include a shorter line and/or fewer stations.—Phil Jenni.

A map in the Pioneer Press the other day made clear what the "Hiawatha Ave, light-rail" project really is. It's an "internal circulator," a "people-mover" for the Minneapolis/Bloomington convention and visitor business (just in linear form).

It'll pick visitors up at the airport, take them to the Convention Center and related hotels downtown, take them out to the Mall of America, take them back to the stores downtown. If a casino ever does get built near the airport, the LRT will serve that, too. It has practically nothing to do with the travel demands of people who live in the metropolitan area.—T.K.

A killer machine: In the last few years, the snowmobile industry has taken a beating when it comes to vehicular safety. The 1996-97 snowmobile season saw 32 fatalities, and the Legislature responded by increasing regulation on the operation of snowmobiles.

But based on a comparison of total registered vehicles, it might surprise some that all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) have higher accident and death rates than snowmobiles. In 1998, a total of 13 people died on ATVs, with the victims' average age just 24. Six fatalities involved collisions with cars or trucks, five were caused by rollovers and two were caused when operators struck trees. Alcohol was involved in four of the fatalities.

The total number of accidents went down from 171 in 1997 to 154 last year. But according to the Department of Natural Resources, of the 154 ATV-related injuries, only one injured operator had an ATV Safety Certificate.—Ron Wirtz.

A friend in New Jersey, who agrees that confining young people to "adolescence" needs re-thinking (see May 18 Minnesota Journal), points out that in World War II 19-year-olds were flying B-17 bombers. Where do teenagers have equivalent responsibility today?

Someone else suggested a book by a teacher in California, Grace Llewellyn, written in 1991 to show young people there are some routes to advancement besides formal schooling. It's The Teenage Liberation Handbook; Lowry House Publishers, Eugene, Ore.—T.K.

When evaluators look at "student performance" why do they look only at academic performance? That's like saying the only thing important about a car is its speed. Nobody believes that. Everybody wants other things in a car, too: good design, safety, reliability, economy, capacity. Parents have multiple objectives for their kids and for school, too.—T.K.

Kids today! They don't respect their teachers, they're unruly and inattentive, they talk back, they walk out of class whenever they feel like it. It's impossible to teach them. A conversation overheard in the teachers' lounge at Andersen School in Minneapolis or Little Canada Elementary or Hutchinson Middle School? Not even close.

The BBC reported (Feb. 11) on a survey of primary- and elementary-school teachers in Japan, in which 44 percent said they had witnessed "collapsed classes." Hiroshi Shiga, a 50-year-old primary school teacher, said he'd never seen anything as bad during his 30 years of teaching.

Shiga said the vaunted Japanese education system, in which a single teacher instructs a class of 40 to 50 pupils who listen obediently, is no longer viable. Kazuko Narui, a teacher and education consultant, said Japan is changing from a group-oriented society to an individualistic one. "You can't expect teachers who've always taught big groups to suddenly know how to cope with rowdy individuals," she said.—Janet Dudrow.

Starting a charter school is a real challenge. So people are always astonished by the desire to go there. Curious about this, National Education Association commissioned a study; and learned that, three to one, teachers would do it again.

A school that will open in Saint Paul next September, the Twin Cities Academy, needed about eight teachers. It got about 200 applications.—T.K.

Trying to put a policy spin, and a smile, on two trips to the dentist in the past 10 days, I was interested in the following data about dentalism (loss of all natural teeth) from the Center for Disease Control. West Virginia leads (the nation with nearly half of its people 65 or older having no remaining natural teeth. On the other end of the scale, only 14 percent of Hawaiians of that age group have lost their toothy smiles. Unfortunately, Minnesota was one of only four states where data were not available. The Dakotas and Iowa ranked 12, 13 and 14 nationally with 30 to 39 percent total tooth loss over 65. Wisconsin must have more dentists. It ranked 42 of the 46 states ranked; joining Hawaii, California, Oregon and Arizona in the less than 20 percent category.—P.J.

"Take Note" contributors this month include Minnesota Journal and Citizens League staff members and Janet Dudrow, policy analyst at Dorsey and Whitney.
Welcome

New and returning members

Arnold "Bill" Aberman
Donna Allan
Darryl Anderson
Janet Anderson
Chuck Ballentine
Diane Commers
Todd and Karen Ferrara
Bryce Hamilton
Jane Hampton
John Harrigan
Rachel M. Hefte
Mary Hepokoski
Ted Johnson
Mary Kennedy
Joan Lapensky
R.S. Leddick
Anne Winslow Lindgren
Steve Lund
Mongsher M. Ly
David Newhall
Robin Rehm
Phil Riveness
Eddie Rogers
Eric Schubert
James K. Wittenberg
Mary Youle

Mind-Openers conclude another successful season

After seven series, and a total of 25 individual meetings, the League’s Mind-Opener breakfast series has concluded its 1998-99 season.

This year’s Mind-Openers covered a broad range of topics, including affordable housing, Y2K and the state’s budget surplus. Special thanks to the following individuals who shared their time and expertise as speakers:

Thinking Outside the Box: Innovative Solutions to the Affordable Housing Crisis
Tom Fulton, President, Family Housing Fund; Steve Cramer, Executive Director, Project for Pride in Living; Jim Stanton, Developer and Director, National Association of Homebuilders; Steve Thomas, Program Director, Corporation for Supportive Housing.

MN School Boards: Time for a New Lesson Plan?
Tom Nelson, Superintendent, Buffalo Schools; Jim Walker, Superintendent, North Branch Schools and Don Helmstetter, Superintendent, Spring Lake Park Schools; Peg Swanson, MN School Boards Association; Wendy Wustenberg, Farmington School Board member; Sen. Larry Pogemiller (DFL-Mpls.) Chair, Senate K-12 Budget Division.

Retooling Economic Development
Steve Keefe and Gary Cunningham, Co-chairs, Citizens League committee on the labor shortage; Jeralyn Jargo, MnSCU Targeted Industry Partnership; Susan Haigh, Ramsey County Board of Commissioners.

Y2K: YU Should Care

Spending Smarter
John Brandl, Dean, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs; Jim Koppel, Executive Director, Children’s Defense Fund; Rep. Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon), Speaker of the House.

New Voices, New Visions
Elwyn Tinklenberg, Commissioner, MN Department of Transportation; Christine Jax, Commissioner, MN Department of Children, Families and Learning; Jan Malcolm, Commissioner, MN Department of Health; Dean Barkley, Director, MN Planning; Ted Mondale, Chair, Metro Council.

Cyber Transit
Jane Anderson, Director, Midwest Institute for Telecommuting Education; Darryl Anderson, Telework Coordinator, MN Department of Transportation; John Sanger, Director, Telecommuter Resources.

The League would also like to thank the following members for moderating one or more Mind-Opener meetings:
Scott Brener, Linda Ewen, Marie Grimm, Peter Hutchinson, Shef Lang, George Latimer, Gene Merriam, Tony Morley, Pam Neary, Matthew Ramadan, Christine Roberts, Jane Vanderpoel, and Griff Wigley.

Mind-Opener policy meetings, which are typically held on Tuesday mornings from Labor Day to Memorial Day, are a regular feature of League programming. They surface and explore emerging issues, provide depth and understanding to current issues and give citizens a chance to ask questions of public leaders.

If you missed one of these meetings and are interested in hearing what the speaker had to say, audio tapes of most of the meetings are available from the League office. Please call (612)338-0791 for details.
Summer brings staff changes to the Citizens League

Goodbye and Good Luck, Ron Wirtz

Always anxious to help with the state’s looming labor shortage, dedicated Citizens League staffer Ron Wirtz has pulled off a two-fer, all within a few weeks of each other.

Taking the long-term view, he and his wife, Sarah, produced a bouncing baby boy, Jack Newton Wirtz, who will be ready to enter the labor force around 2020 or so, when some CL staffers will be collecting Social Security benefits, if there are any left to collect by then.

Ron also took the short-term view by filling a position at the riverfront offices of the Federal Reserve Bank. The economists and policy analysts there obviously convinced him their labor shortage was more desperate than that of the hugely overstaffed Citizens League office. His last day at the League will be June 25.

Wirtz leaves the League staff after nearly four years. A native of Wisconsin, he followed his then-fiancée Sarah to the Twin Cities after four years in the Milwaukee area where he was editor of a community newspaper and taught at Marquette University.

During his tenure he staffers committees that produced these reports: It Takes a Region to Build Livable Neighborhoods, co-chaired by Don Fraser and Sally Evert; A Competitive Place in the Quality Race, co-chaired by Buzz Cummins and Jane Vanderpool; Baby Steps to 2030: A New Wrinkle on Aging, co-chaired by Katie White and Kent Eklund; and Help Wanted: More Opportunities Than People, co-chaired by Gary Cunningham and Steve Keefe. Wirtz is currently staffing the committee on workforce training chaired by Roger Hale.

In addition to his committee work, Wirtz programmed the Mind-Openers for three years and was a regular contributor to the Minnesota Journal.

Good luck Ron. We’re going to miss you.

Hello and Welcome, David Chadwick

David Chadwick joined the Citizens League’s staff at the start of June as our newest research associate. He will be replacing Ron Wirtz, who is leaving the League’s staff at the end of the month.

Originally from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Chadwick moved to the Twin Cities earlier this year from Washington, D.C. While in Washington, Chadwick worked for Senator Dianne Feinstein of California, most recently as a legislative assistant for environmental and agricultural issues.

"After a few years of working and living on Capitol Hill, I decided it was time to return to the Midwest," said Chadwick, who now resides in Minneapolis. "Although I genuinely enjoyed working for the Senate, it was not always the best environment for really reflecting on public issues or thinking ahead of the immediate agenda. From that standpoint, I am really looking forward to being part of the Citizens League’s work."

Chadwick is a graduate of Pomona College in Claremont, California, where he studied American politics and public policy. While attending Pomona, Chadwick spent a semester studying the British political party system at Oxford University.

In addition to working for Senator Feinstein, he has had internships with Senator Tom Daschle of South Dakota and the Trust for Public Land, a national land conservation group.

At the League, Chadwick will take over the staffing of the workforce committee and help develop and implement the League’s 2000 legislative agenda.

Welcome aboard, Dave.

Welcome back, Gayle Ruther

Gayle Ruther, former Citizens League receptionist and research secretary, is back at the League. Ruther left the League a year ago to take a job closer to her home in White Bear Lake. But she found that she missed the excitement and stimulation of the League. The League was happy to re-sign her. In fact, we did not fill her position permanently. Several ads turned up no qualified candidates so we opted instead for a series of temporary workers hoping we would identify someone whom we could hire for fulltime work. We are delighted that she’s bringing her friendly smile and demeanor back to the League staff.

Citizens League

www.citizensleague.net

Use of the League web site continues to grow. Average daily hits has doubled since last September, from 288 per day to 566 in April. Total hits for the fiscal year are now well over 100,000. Don’t forget that materials from both of the current study committees can be found on the web site. If you don’t have time to serve on the committee but are interested in the subject log-on to www.citizensleague.net.

Ballots due by June 29

All League members should have received their ballots for the annual election of the Citizens League Board of Directors. Eight of the 10 candidates will be elected to a three-year term beginning this August. Ballots are due at the League office by Tuesday, June 29. An Election Committee eagerly awaits your decision.

Endowment Fund

In December, the League received a letter from the St. Paul Foundation informing us that income from the League’s endowment fund was being increased to $4,463 “because of substantial contributions made to this fund during the first half of the year.” We’re happy to report that the income has increased again—to $5,849. Thank you so much to the 38 people who have contributed to the endowment.