



# **Citizens League Report**

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## **The Party Caucus: An Inquiry**

**April 5, 1991**

***Public affairs  
research and education  
in the Twin Cities  
metropolitan area***

**CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT**

**THE PARTY CAUCUS:  
AN INQUIRY**

Prepared by:

Minnesota Party Caucus Committee

*John Himle and Jeff Spartz*  
Co-chairs

*Jane Gregerson*  
Chair, Member Activities

Approved by the Citizens League Board of Directors

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**CITIZENS LEAGUE**  
708 South Third Street, Suite 500  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55415  
612/338-0791

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# INTRODUCTION

## CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Political party caucuses, held in the 4,100 election precincts around Minnesota, represent the first in a series of steps leading up to the designation of party nominees for public office at local, legislative district, statewide, and congressional district levels. They are also a forum for debating issues that define party platforms.

The Citizens League undertook a study of the party caucus because of the importance of expanding political participation among the citizenry. The caucus represents one of the most basic opportunities for people to become involved in the political system. It provides the opportunity for a community to influence who runs for elective office and to help steer the direction of public policy. These kinds of opportunities are essential to the effective workings of a representative democracy.

However, Minnesota has seen evidence of growing dissatisfaction with the caucus from citizens and elected officials on both sides of the political aisle. Although no bills affecting the caucus passed in 1990, legislators introduced and debated amendments that would have changed the caucus/convention system.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the start of the 1991 legislative session, some legislators indicated they would likely introduce legislation to change the structure of Minnesota's caucus/convention system. Although legislators kept the caucus system intact, they changed the date the caucus is held from the fourth Tuesday in February to the first Tuesday following the first Monday in March.<sup>2</sup>

Our study of the caucus system was not limited to what happens on precinct caucus night itself. We defined the caucus *system* to include not only the party caucus but also the subsequent events that produce nominees for the general election. This includes all conventions and activity including the primary election now held in September.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, this report is nominally about caucus night but it actually encompasses much more. Its emphasis is on providing opportunities for political participation. As such, the report offers not only recommendations for improving the caucus, but also a nonjudgmental discussion of the pros and cons of additional changes to the caucus, intended to edify readers without endorsing one method over another.

It is important to note, however, that this report does not go into the many other factors that influence the election process. Campaign practices and financing, spending limits, voting procedures, and other state election laws play significant roles in the election process but will not be addressed in this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The 1990 Legislature did legislate changes to the presidential primary established by the 1989 Legislature. For the first time since the 1950s Minnesota voters will cast their preferences among presidential candidates in a 1992 primary. (See Appendix 3.)

<sup>2</sup> The Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party wanted to hold the 1992 caucus on the first Tuesday in March to comply with rules of the Democratic National Committee. Gov. Carlson vetoed the bill containing this provision (among other bills), but DFL legislators challenged the legality of the vetoes and won the dispute in court.

<sup>3</sup> Minnesota's state primary is now held on the first Tuesday following the second Monday in September of even-numbered years.



## A DIFFERENT STUDY PROCESS

The caucus study process did not fit the pattern of the customary Citizens League study, in several respects. Although the study committee followed the usual Citizens League procedures, the study was designed to be short -- to attract members that wanted to participate in a study but could not dedicate time to weekly meetings over a six to nine month period. As a result, the committee's time both with resource speakers and in discussion was limited.

The study was also designed to permit the Board of Directors to spend more than its usual time developing the League position on this topic. While the Board studied and discussed the report of the study committee, it also intended to play a larger role in deciding the final content of the report.

Along this same vein, the Board had input on the caucus topic from sources other than the study committee. The League offered other opportunities for its members to interact on the caucus topic. After ascertaining what activities the League membership would be most interested in pursuing, the League designed two projects around the caucus topic to enlist the input of members who had not signed up to serve on the committee. One of these projects was what the League called *Speak Ups*. The *Speak Ups* were small group discussions of the caucus system, in the homes of 11 League members around the metropolitan region. The *Speak Ups* were intended to provide members a one-evening opportunity to learn about and debate the caucus topic. About 120 persons participated. Many more people (about 325) participated in the second project: a questionnaire designed to elicit Citizens League members' opinions on the caucus. The questionnaire was mailed to all members in a special issue of the Citizens League *Matters* dedicated to the caucus project.

The *Speak Ups*, questionnaire results, and the study committee's report provided the Board with information from three different groups, each with a slightly different composition and perspective. Together this information created a framework within which the Board made its decisions about the League's position on the party caucus.

## WHAT THIS REPORT CONTAINS

This report presents the work of the study committee as well as the results of the *Speak Ups* and caucus questionnaire. Chapter 1 describes Minnesota's caucus/convention system, its objectives and problems.

Chapter 2 explains what the committee concluded about the caucus, its strengths and weaknesses, and some of the results of the *Speak Ups* and caucus questionnaire. Chapter 3 presents the recommendations about changing the caucus.

Chapter 4 goes beyond the recommendations and presents, in an essay format, some of the strengths and weaknesses of additional ideas for changing the caucus. Unlike the earlier chapters, Chapter 4 does not reflect policy positions taken by the Citizens League. Rather, it lays out some alternatives to the existing caucus/convention system that will likely be a part of the ongoing debate in Minnesota. It is intended to help in understanding alternatives to the present caucus, without endorsing them.

The appendices contain summaries of the Citizens League *Speak Ups* and the results of the League's caucus questionnaire, as well as other background information.

The end of the report includes the charge to the committee, the members who served, and how the work was conducted.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **A DESCRIPTION OF MINNESOTA'S CAUCUS SYSTEM**

### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MINNESOTA CAUCUS**

Minnesota's system for nominating candidates evolved from a system controlled by elected officials who were the state's political elites, to one today where virtually any party member with the time and inclination can participate. In fact, control over party nominations today is diffused to the point that even non-party members have the opportunity, in the primary elections, to decide who will be a party's nominee.

For the first 40 years of the state's history, candidate selection was in the hands of the political professionals, according to Dr. Hyman Berman, professor of history at the University of Minnesota. Typically, a caucus of a political party's legislators would meet to select candidates to run in the next election. Challenges to incumbents usually came only when splits occurred in the party.

At the turn of the century, control over candidate selection began shifting from the politicians to the populace. As happened elsewhere around the country, the era of the Progressives ushered in reforms that led to increased citizen participation in the political process and less party boss control. For instance, the secret ballot replaced ballots that were dropped into boxes designated by political party. Party caucuses at this time gave party members an opportunity to scrutinize and recommend candidates. Other reforms considered at the time included the citizens' right to initiate legislation, referenda to change laws, and the recall of elected officials.

In 1899 Gov. John Lind proposed some measures to bring the citizenry closer to the process, but the Legislature decided against them. Nonetheless, interest in popularizing the political process remained. This was accomplished later in part by instituting primary elections for determining what candidates would run in the general election. The primary placed in the hands of the voters the decision about who could run for office. Primaries have been viewed widely as a product of anti-party sentiment; they are a means to take control over designating candidates away from party leaders and give it to the electorate.

By 1912 the primary became the means for selecting candidates to Minnesota's constitutional offices as well as other elective offices. It was a direct and open primary, with no requirement for party registration. The 1913 Legislature also eliminated party designation for state legislators, partly to limit city machine politics and the power of party bosses and patronage.

In the following decade the existing political parties were weakened as insurgent groups arose, particularly the Nonpartisan Leaguers, a political movement demanding reform legislation and collective public ownership of many services and utilities. By the early 1920s enough persons thought the parties had been weakened too much that additional changes were made: In 1922 the party caucuses were allowed to pre-screen candidates and endorse persons who then would appear on the ballot as party-endorsed candidates. This came about largely because then-Gov. J. A. O. Preus wanted to assume the U.S. Senate seat vacated when Knute Nelson died. Anticipating the special election in 1923, Gov. Preus thought he could prevent potential problems in the open primary by carrying the endorsement of the Republican party.

This change in 1922 gave additional strength to the party caucus and essentially defined the role of the caucus up to present time. Recent reforms in the political system include the change back to a partisan state legislature in 1973, and the establishment of a presidential preference primary by the 1989 and 1990 Legislatures to be used for the 1992 presidential race. (Additional details about Minnesota's presidential primary are in Appendix 3.)

## THE NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES IN OTHER STATES

The widespread use of primary elections in the United States has replaced the parties' function of nominating candidates. In many states the parties are simply no longer in that business. Candidates usually get their names on the primary ballot by filing petitions with a required number of signatures.

Twenty-nine states have no state law or known informal procedures governing preprimary endorsements of candidates. Two states -- California and Florida -- explicitly prohibit parties from making preprimary endorsements. It should be pointed out that the system of party endorsements is a fluid one, changing even from election to election in some areas.

However, in 18 states the parties retain some degree of control over nominations by making preprimary endorsements of candidates.<sup>4</sup> Eleven states are like Minnesota in that the party endorsement processes are informal; the endorsement is a party procedure that carries no legal status. In the other seven states with party endorsements, the state laws either require or formally allow parties to make preprimary endorsements. The endorsements can be done through state conventions with delegates elected specifically for this purpose, or by the party central committees. A majority vote (or more) usually determines who becomes the endorsee. However, several states allow less than a majority vote to get on the primary ballot.

Some states may have several candidates on the ballot, but with only one candidate carrying the official endorsement. Only two states, Colorado and Utah, actually have several candidates on the ballot, each of whom receives a party endorsement. (See Appendix 5 for additional details on preprimary endorsements in selected states.)

## THE ROLES OF THE STATE AND THE PARTIES IN THE CAUCUS SYSTEM

Minnesota's party caucus system is one defined largely by the major political parties themselves.<sup>5</sup> Although state law determines the framework for caucuses (see figure on next page), by governing who can participate, the date, time, and other logistics of the meeting, the parties control the actual business of the caucus. In fact, the statutes state that other than electing chairs and other officers, and selecting delegates to the future convention, the caucus may be used to conduct "any other business as prescribed by party rules."

<sup>4</sup> Two states, Iowa and South Dakota, specifically allow *postprimary* party endorsements if the winner of the primary fails to receive a certain percentage of the primary vote. (Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, *The Transformation in American Politics: Implications for Federalism*, Washington D.C., 1986.)

<sup>5</sup> Minnesota statutes define major political parties as: A political party that maintains a party organization and (1) had at least one candidate for election that received votes from at least five percent of those voting in the last state general election or (2) presents a petition to the secretary of state with names that number at least five percent of those who voted in the last general election.

## MINNESOTA LAWS REGARDING THE CAUCUS

Minnesota statutes govern the following components of the precinct caucus:

- *Time and date* of the caucus; procedure for postponement due to inclement weather
- *Advance notice requirement* for call of the caucus, including the business to be conducted
- *Published meeting notice* six days prior to caucus; meeting notice to county auditor 20 days prior to caucus
- *Location of caucus* in regular polling place or other suitable place meeting accessibility standards
- *Services for communicatively impaired individuals*
- *Eligibility of participants*
- *Requirement for electing a chair* and other officers as provided by party rules
- *Requirement to withhold from voting in first half hour of caucus*, and to hold open nominations for officers and delegates for at least the first quarter hour
- *Voting by secret ballot*
- *Prohibitions against other public meetings* after 6:00 p.m. on caucus day
- *Use of public facilities* for holding caucuses
- *Permission for the Secretary of State to be involved with public information* related to caucuses and reporting caucus results

The national parties, particularly the Democratic party, expect the state parties to abide by the national rules. These rules govern the method of delegate selection, the timing of the selection process, eligibility for participation, and the allocation of delegates to candidates. (See Appendix 1 for an outline of these rules.) In addition to these rules, both the national Democratic and Republican parties adopted standards of fairness to govern the delegate selection process.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, the business of the conventions at the county/legislative district, congressional district, and state level that follow the precinct caucus is in the hands of the parties. State statutes only require that: (1) the political parties provide for each congressional district and each county or legislative district a convention at least once every state general election year,<sup>7</sup> and (2) the parties provide appropriate services for delegates who need interpreters, or Braille or audio tape materials.

<sup>6</sup> Most of the current Democratic party rules resulted from reforms recommended by the McGovern-Fraser Commission following the 1968 convention. The intent of the reforms was threefold: (1) broaden public access to, and participation in, the delegate selection process; (2) increase representation at the convention of groups traditionally underrepresented; and (3) allocate convention delegates according to grass roots sentiment of party members. Republicans also reexamined their nominating procedures around that time, but the changes made were, by some accounts, less dramatic. Compared to the Democrats, the Republican state parties retained more authority over the delegate selection process. For instance, although the 1972 GOP National Committee adopted as one of its reforms a prohibition against discrimination, this did not go as far as the Democratic reform that urged action in each state to encourage participation by all groups. A state Democratic party that did not comply with affirmative action risked being unseated at the convention. See Thomas R. Marshall, *Presidential Nominations in a Reform Age*, Praeger Publishers, 1981, pp. 36-38, and Kevin Coleman, *A Summary of National and State Party Rules and State Laws Concerning the Delegates to the 1988 Democratic and Republican National Conventions*, Congressional Research Service, March 14, 1988.

<sup>7</sup> Minnesota statutes also provide leave time from employment for official delegates or alternate delegates to attend official conventions. Employers must allow such employees leave from work without penalty or deduction from wages other than for the actual time of absence from employment, if the employee provides at least 10 days written notice to the employer.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE CAUCUS

The Citizens League believes the primary purpose of the caucus ought to be *providing an opportunity to expand informed participation in the political process*. Opportunities for effective citizen democracy lie in a structure that not only permits but also encourages citizens to take part in selecting candidates for public office and establishing positions on important public policies. The caucus is intended to provide that opportunity. Without the party caucus, decisions about who runs for office would remain under the control of the political elite. Ordinary citizens would not enjoy the degree of participation in the political process that Minnesotans have historically embraced.

Although the League feels strongly that this is the case, not everyone agrees on the purpose of the caucus. State statutes do not spell out explicit purposes for the caucus.

Persons who are active in the major political parties tend to view the caucus somewhat differently from others. Some persons view the caucus as a means to conduct the work of the major political parties by advancing their agendas in the selection of candidates and establishment of party platforms. Others see it as a basic tool to promote citizen democracy at the local level, without regard for the welfare of the party. Therein lies a conflict.

The latter group believes that persons without DFL or IR affiliation (the many self-designated "independents") and inactive party members are left out of the caucus system, and therefore do not have the same opportunity to participate in grass roots political activity as active DFL or IR members. Those that view the caucus primarily as a mechanism for conducting party business state that if the independents or inactive party members do not choose to caucus with either of the two major political parties, they can make their political voice heard by voting in the primary to select candidates and in general elections to elect officials. (Of course, individuals can organize around third-party candidates who, by state statute, may nominate themselves by petition to be on the general election ballot.<sup>9</sup> Candidates nominated by petition are not placed on any state *primary* ballots.)

### NATIONAL PARTY STANDARDS GOVERNING FAIRNESS OF DELEGATE SELECTION

#### Democratic

- State parties shall adopt affirmative action plans to govern delegate selection.
- No cost or fee may be charged to participate.
- Events must be scheduled for times and places most likely to encourage participation of all Democrats, and must be fully publicized.
- Discrimination is prohibited on the basis of race, sex, age, color, creed, national origin, religion, ethnic identity, economic status, sexual orientation, or philosophical persuasion.
- Outreach programs to underrepresented groups are to be developed.
- Equal numbers of men and women shall be delegates and alternates.
- Petition requirements for participation shall not exceed one percent of registered or voting Democrats, or 1,000 signatures.
- The "unit rule" is prohibited.<sup>8</sup>

#### Republican

- All delegates must be publicly selected at open meetings; automatic or ex officio delegates are prohibited.
- No proxy voting is allowed.
- Fees may not exceed state law.
- Discrimination in the selection of delegates is prohibited.

<sup>8</sup> The unit rule allows winner-take-all primaries in which the top vote-getting candidate receives all delegates.

<sup>9</sup> Nomination by petition requires a certain number of eligible signatures for the different elective offices, as follows: For a state office voted on statewide or U.S. Senator: 2,000 signatures or one percent of those voting in the last general election; Congressional or judicial district office: 1,000 signatures or five percent of those voting in the district during the last general election; County or legislative office: 500 signatures or 10 percent of the total voting in the district at the last general election.

## FEATURES OF THE CAUCUS

Despite differences in perspective on the caucus' purpose, the caucus is used today to:

- provide grassroots involvement in the political process to interested citizens;
- generate issue discussion to yield positions that will constitute the party platform;
- begin the screening process of candidates that leads up to designating party candidates;
- create wider interest in running for office and nurture potential candidates;
- elect delegates to the subsequent conventions; and
- elect local party leaders, conduct local party business, and build the party organization.

Unlike other methods of selecting candidates, Minnesota's party caucus system is an open one in which any interested person may participate. Eligibility rules are simple: State law says to vote or be elected a delegate at a caucus, a person must be eligible to vote at the time of the next general election, and either agree with the party's constitution, have voted with the party at the last general election, or intend to vote with the party at the next election.

Another advantage is the opportunity to involve large numbers of people in influencing public policy. Minnesota's tradition suggests that common citizens should play a role in selecting their government leaders; this should not be left up to only the political professionals or the current set of elected officials. Obviously, left in the hands of the politicians, party nominations could result in few challenges to incumbents. The chances of newcomers becoming the party nominees would be diminished.

Precinct caucuses afford a unique opportunity to challengers of incumbents. Through caucuses, challengers can organize at the neighborhood level and, if they enlist enough support at the caucus and subsequent conventions, eventually go on to win the party's endorsement. Without the caucus and its local structure, a challenger would need significantly more financial and political resources to unseat an incumbent than is currently necessary.

Minnesota's caucuses also have the advantage of being very visible and public. Candidates aren't selected behind closed doors. State laws provide minimum requirements for notifying citizens about the caucus and ensuring that all who are interested may participate. Some states, such as New York, give the power of determining who goes on the ballot to the persons who sit on party central committees, people who have no obligation to be accessible or accountable to ordinary citizens.

Compared with systems whereby candidates get on the ballot by submitting petitions with a required number of signatures, the caucus has the advantage that it provides a method for filtering out potential candidates who could widely be acknowledged as unfit for the job, i.e., criminals or kooks. Through its deliberative process, the caucus and convention system allows party members to screen candidates and requires candidates to first, make their positions known and second, persuade others that they are the best person for the job.

The caucus also provides the opportunity to debate issues that participants feel are important. Other systems of selecting candidates for office, such as a primary election only, do not provide the chance for people to gather with their neighbors and discuss the issues that concern them most.

## FULFILLING THE PROMISE OF POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

Despite the appeal of the caucus as a tool for providing opportunities for participation in the political process, in practice this doesn't happen enough. Even though the success of the caucus can not be measured by attendance alone, it is a fact that relatively few Minnesotans avail themselves of the chance to participate in the caucus.

### PARTICIPATION AT THE PRECINCT CAUCUS IS LOW

Although official statewide records of caucus attendance for the 4,100 precincts are not kept, caucus sign-up-sheets allowed the political parties to estimate attendance at 25,000 for the IRs and 60,000 for the DFLers in 1990. This estimate represents about three percent of Minnesota voters registered to vote (2.7 million voters were registered out of 3.2 million who were eligible) in the 1990 general election. By comparison, 68 percent of registered voters voted in the 1990 general election, and 31 percent voted in the September 1990 primary election. (See Figure 1.1.)

Caucus attendance usually peaks in presidential election years: The parties estimated 100,000 and 60,000 participants in the DFL and IR caucuses, respectively, in 1988. This amounts to 5.5 percent of those registered to vote in the 1988 general election.<sup>10</sup> Caucus attendance has varied over the past two decades (see Figure 1.2), but has never represented more than a small percent of registered Minnesota voters.

### Problems with Low Participation at the Caucus

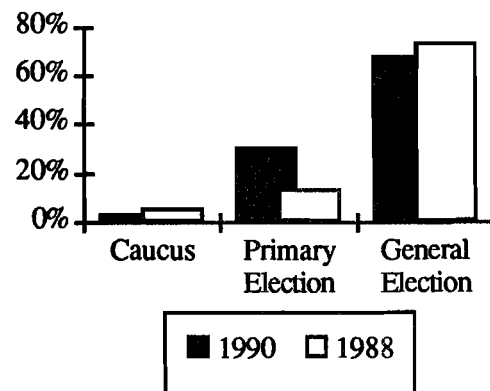
Low attendance at the caucus is problematic for several reasons. First and foremost, the success of our democracy depends on the concern and involvement of our citizens in its governing. Citizen democracy demands active and engaged individuals who care about civic action and participate both in the traditional election process as well as other citizen decisionmaking.

Participating in the political process is an important civic value -- as Henry Cisneros, former mayor of San Antonio, put it -- "a shared commitment to the common good and security of the community's future."<sup>11</sup> Without this civic activism our traditional democratic values are diminished.

Second, low attendance can be detrimental to the competitive two-party system. It could result in party positions and candidates that do not reflect the views of the full party electorate (or a majority of it). In that event, the party risks fielding candidates and taking positions unacceptable to the majority of voters needed to win elections. To be successful, a party must be able to attract enough voters to its candidates to win elections.

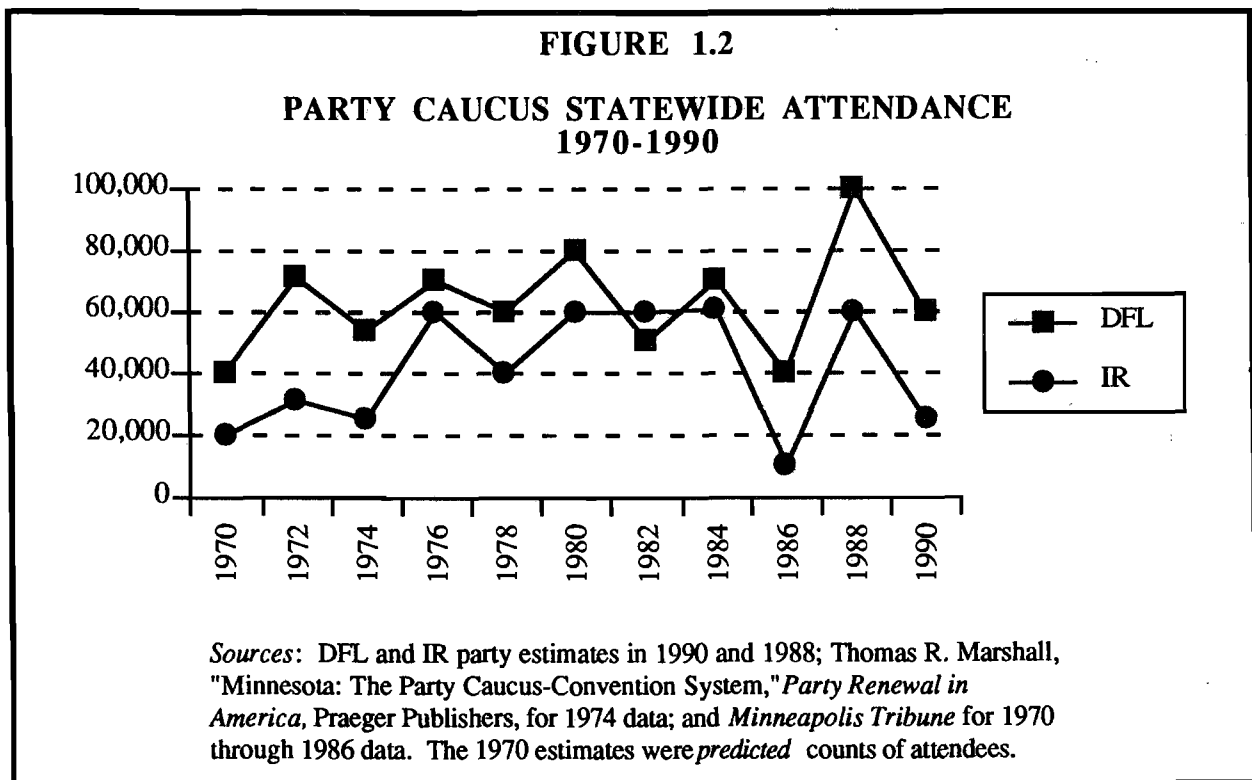
Participants who represent single-issue viewpoints may dominate the caucus, according to testimony the committee received and the feedback from the League's caucus questionnaire and *Speak Ups*. While not necessarily a concern by themselves, the dominating single-interest groups may have positions that

**FIGURE 1.1**  
**PERCENT OF REGISTERED VOTERS PARTICIPATING IN CAUCUS, PRIMARY, AND GENERAL ELECTION 1988 AND 1990**



<sup>10</sup> Secretary of State, Election Division, *The Minnesota Legislative Manual 1989-1990*, St. Paul, 1989, pp. 348-349.

<sup>11</sup> Henry G. Cisneros and John Parr, "Reinvigorating Democratic Values: Challenge and Necessity," *National Civic Review*, Sept./Oct. 1990, p. 409.



are not in line with the majority of party members. Some believe the focus on these interests tends to drive away party members with more moderate viewpoints who would otherwise be active.

Over time, low levels of participation leave the party organization without new blood. For the health and vitality of the parties, incoming members who bring fresh ideas and new resources to the party organization are needed.

Further, low attendance limits the parties' ability to nurture and recruit future candidates for public office. Often in the past, potential candidates used their time in the caucus/convention system to gain the political campaign experience and contacts they needed to run their own race. Lacking a large universe of potential candidates hurts the parties' chances of fielding promising candidates.

### **LACK OF INFORMATION AND PROCEDURAL COMPLEXITY OF CAUCUS ARE DETRIMENTAL**

In our view, the general populace is not as informed about caucuses as it could be. Most people may have a vague idea of what caucuses are but are unfamiliar with their purposes and procedures, not to mention caucus rules. Not only are people insufficiently aware of the time and place of the caucus, but they also lack a general understanding of what happens at a caucus and what participants do there.

This lack of understanding leads to low attendance. Results of a Citizens League questionnaire showed that the largest group of members not attending caucuses in 1990 would do so in 1992 *if* they had a better understanding of what would happen and what would be expected of them (see Appendix 2).

### **The State is Not Required to Provide Caucus Information**

Although state law regulates some parts of the caucus, including procedures for notifying people, the state itself has no direct role in notifying voters. State statutes require the county or legislative district



executive committee chair to issue a call for the precinct caucus 20 days prior to the event. The call is to include certain information about the logistics of the caucus, the business to be conducted, and the number of delegates to be elected.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the chair is required to publish information on the day, place, and time of the caucus six days before the event, and provide this information to the county auditor 20 days before the caucus. County auditors are directed to give this information to persons who request it. Although not required to do so, the office of Secretary of State provides flyers with information about the nature of the caucus.<sup>13</sup> Currently, the state has no legal obligation in this area.

### The Caucus May Be Overwhelming to Newcomers

Little is done at the caucus meeting itself to alleviate the apprehensions of those unfamiliar with caucuses. Someone who decides to attend is confronted with overly complex rules, bureaucratic procedures, and some very tedious activities. A newcomer is more likely to feel overwhelmed than welcomed at the caucus. An example of this complexity is the method of selecting delegates at DFL caucuses known as proportional representation voting, or the walking subcaucus.<sup>14</sup> Although the premise behind this voting method is to ensure that participants who are in the minority in their support of candidates or issues are not quickly dismissed via a majority vote, the practice itself is unfamiliar to most people who aren't acquainted with DFL caucuses. Determining how many delegates each subcaucus is allowed to select is by itself a five step process.

The conveners and chairs of the caucuses ought to be able to manage the meeting well and reduce the complexity for participants. Some conveners have served in that role for years and are skilled in running meetings. All too often, however, this is not the case and the conveners do not facilitate easy participation. Both major political parties offer training for caucus conveners, but training is not required and there is no assurance that the conveners participate. Although no one has studied this problem to be able to say how widespread it is, there is anecdotal evidence, both from testimony to the committee and the results of the *Speak Ups*, to suggest the problem of poorly run caucuses is a valid concern.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF ISSUE DEBATE AT THE CAUCUS IS UNDERMINED

Debating issues is an important part of Minnesota's precinct caucuses. Minnesota enjoys a reputation as a state where the parties' caucuses are extraordinarily issue-oriented.<sup>15</sup> Historically, voters here have greatly valued the give-and-take of discussing resolutions at the precinct level. This view was validated by the responses of both the Citizens League *Speak Ups* and the member questionnaire on caucuses.

<sup>12</sup> *Minn. Stat.* (1990) § 202A.14, subd. 2, requires the name of the party, precinct number, date, place and hours of the caucus, statutory rules governing the caucus, a statement of the business to be conducted, number of delegates to be elected, name of the chair issuing the call, name of the convener of the caucus and space for the names of officers and delegates elected by the caucus.

<sup>13</sup> *Minn. Stat.* (1990) § 202A.20, subd. 1, states: "The secretary of state may sponsor or participate in activities designed to provide public information related to the precinct caucuses and to promote participation in the caucus process."

<sup>14</sup> The use of proportional representation voting, or the walking subcaucus, may be used to select delegates when more people want to serve as delegates than the number of delegate positions open. A caucus can require its use if the number of those who want to use it is greater than or equal to the number needed to elect one delegate. In this voting method the caucus members break down into small groups identified by certain issues or candidates or uncommitted stances. The small groups attempt to gather enough other participants in their subcaucuses to allow them to elect a delegate. For instance, if eight people are needed to elect one delegate, but a subcaucus has only six members, the subcaucus will seek out two other individuals to join them. They do this by walking around and encouraging others to align with their interests -- hence the name walking subcaucus.

<sup>15</sup> Malcolm E. Jewell, *Parties and Primaries: Nominating State Governors*, Praeger Publishers, 1984, p. 77.

For instance, more than 70 percent of those Citizens League members who returned a caucus questionnaire and attended a caucus in 1990 said they attended because of the opportunity to support issues important to them. (See the results of the caucus questionnaire in Appendix 2.)

Issues usually play a large role in the selection of delegates at the caucus. For instance, in a survey of DFL delegates in 1982, 37 percent said their major interest in seeking election was issues, 11 percent said candidates, and 43 percent said both; only nine percent said neither.<sup>16</sup> Often in the DFL caucus, participants will form subcaucuses identified by a position on a specific issue or group of issues.

Nonetheless, the procedures and results of issue debate at caucuses have proven troublesome. There is no attempt at the caucuses to inform participants about the party's current platform, and whether issues they are debating would alter or add to it. And it is unlikely that the same issues will be debated at all caucuses within a party; consequently, there is no measure of how widespread the support may be for a particular resolution. In addition, at some caucuses the time spent on issue debate is sometimes diminished because other procedural matters take precedence. Debate may continue late in the night, after many participants have left.

The number of issues debated at the caucus yields a lengthy list of resolutions, resulting in the potential for a long, unwieldy platform to which candidates are usually not held accountable, and with which voters are unfamiliar. At the state convention, most of the time is focused on selecting officers and delegates, and endorsing candidates; even though the conventions pass a platform with numerous planks, few issues gain much widespread publicity.

Some people contend the platform has become so lengthy as to be unmanageable and not helpful to either candidates or voters. Without meaningful platforms, voters have difficulty evaluating the performance of elected officials according to the policies linked with the party label. The party, too, has little opportunity to hold officials accountable to the platform.

Candidates are not obligated to uphold the party platform. They prefer to avoid commitments to strongly worded stands on controversial issues. According to testimony, some candidates attempt to distance themselves from the platform because they want the option to disregard party activists' positions when they run counter to their own personal or constituent views. Furthermore, the party itself does not work to get the platform positions embodied in public policy.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 2

# CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE CAUCUS SYSTEM

### RETAIN BUT IMPROVE THE CAUCUS

Based on our study we conclude:

- **The caucus system ought to be retained, albeit with some changes.** We believe that the caucus system, in some modified form, could meet its basic objectives as described in Chapter 1.

We believe that the advantages of the caucus/convention system outweigh its disadvantages, and further, that some changes to the system could mitigate the disadvantages. This was not a casual or unanimous decision. We considered abolishing the precinct caucus entirely. However, because the sentiment for abolishment was not widespread, we pursued the other tack of improving the existing system.

As a broad-based, open-to-all vehicle for political participation, the caucus should be improved and preserved in Minnesota.

### BARRIERS PREVENT GREATER CAUCUS PARTICIPATION

Second, we conclude:

- **Greater participation at the precinct caucuses is a desirable goal, but the system has features that discourage participation.**

Results from the Citizens League caucus questionnaire indicate that those who did not attend caucuses in 1990 stayed away because they:

- had no tie to either of the two major political parties;
- felt their attendance would have no impact; or
- believed that the caucus is really for "insiders."

Many of those who did not attend said they would if they *knew ahead of time what would happen and what was expected of them*, or if they knew that an *issue they feel strongly about would be a priority item*. (See Appendix 2 for additional details on the results of the questionnaire.)

Some of the barriers we identified, such as the day on which caucuses are held, are inherent to the way caucuses are currently structured. (See figure on next page.) Others, such as a lack of general public understanding of caucuses, are symptoms of broader societal trends.

Those barriers that are structural in nature are the easiest to remedy, although no change will be simple. Other barriers are more deeply rooted in changing societal norms and individual values. (See figure on next page.) Even though they compromise the effectiveness of the caucus as a tool for political involvement, these barriers are entrenched and unlikely to change easily or quickly.

For instance, people's sense of the importance of politics and their desire to be involved are the function of large forces and long-term trends with nationwide impacts. Changes in the demographics of families and the work force are examples. The increasing trend of two wage-earners per family and the growing number of single-parent families mean fewer persons have the luxury of giving time and energy to political involvement.

Political parties themselves have changed. Across the country, the parties' control has been challenged. As Gerald M. Pomper, an expert on political parties wrote, "Legislators, activists, and impersonal social forces have combined to weaken, circumvent, restrain, and degrade the formal party organizations."<sup>17</sup> Since the turn of the century, political parties around the country have undergone dramatic transformations. Political parties no longer enjoy the power they once had in nominating or recruiting candidates, assisting politicians' campaigns, or rewarding party loyalists with jobs. The trend has been more and more away from the centralized control of the party elite to a more egalitarian control shared by a broader group.

One example of this is the prevalence of primary elections in the U.S. The majority of states now employ primaries to determine who will be a party's candidate for state and local office; in the past, this was a decision negotiated within the party. Furthermore, the election ballot may allow the voter to vote for any candidate, without binding the voter to a particular party.

Parties are on the sidelines in financing campaigns. Most candidates receive their campaign financing through contributions directly to their individual campaigns. How candidates run for office, as well as how they finance their campaigns, have contributed to changing perceptions about the importance of political involvement. For instance, although candidates may call themselves DFLers or IRs, they have no obligation to support their respective party platforms. Political party involvement simply isn't as necessary as it once was to recruiting and electing candidates.

Parties haven't been able to consistently maintain people's affiliations. In Minnesota, public opinion polls over time show that voters mold their party preferences to fit the fluid political scene.<sup>18</sup> For example, if a Republican administration is perceived to be having problems, more voters state their preference for the DFL party; conversely, if a Republican governor is riding high in public opinion, more people state their preference for the IRs. Society has observed declining participation in many

### POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO CAUCUS PARTICIPATION RESULTING FROM HOW CAUCUS IS STRUCTURED

- Intimidating rule complexity
- Day of the week caucus is held
- Heavy reliance on procedural matters can undermine the issue debate and discussion of candidates
- Use of the complicated subcaucus/proportional representation voting
- Conflict with other events held that night
- Great number of resolutions, insufficient time/depth in debate
- Month caucus is held
- Conducting party business that is uninteresting to participants
- Need for daycare
- Time of the meeting
- Half-hour waiting period required before voting
- Use of the majority vote discourages minority viewpoints
- Caucuses are called only by major political parties; independents wouldn't feel included
- Untrained caucus chairs/conveners

<sup>17</sup> Gerald M. Pomper, editor, *Party Renewal in America*, Praeger Publishers, 1980, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> "DFL gains in party preference," *StarTribune*, July 29, 1991, p. 3B.

mediating institutions, such as churches and civic organizations. Political parties have not been immune to these trends here or elsewhere in the country.

Added to that, some persons feel a civic duty to participate in the selection of candidates and discussion of issues, but they are simply not interested in the rest of the business of the party.

Other factors, such as the changing nature of political interactions, affect people's desire to be politically active. Advocacy groups, single-interest groups, and both private- and public-sector lobbyists are far more numerous at the state Capitol today than in the past. Political action committees play a dominant role in campaign financing. Those who are not affiliated with these organized groups tend to perceive these groups as 'insiders' with the knowledge and resources to inordinately influence the political process. Witness the responses from nearly 40 percent of those Citizens League members who did not attend last year's caucus and responded to our caucus questionnaire: They did not attend because they believed either they would have no impact or the caucus is only for insiders.

Combined, these forces overpower the capacity of the caucus to provide the level of informed political involvement important to our representative democracy. Reversing the trends that characterize our society and that have intensified over the years, however, is probably not possible, even if we agreed it was desirable.

## PARTY PLATFORMS ARE LESS MEANINGFUL

Third, we conclude that:

- Party platforms have become less meaningful and are too long.

Having a forum where people can gather to discuss significant issues is a traditional feature of the party caucus. Minnesota is perhaps unique in its heavy emphasis on issue debate during its candidate selection process. But especially because people who attend the caucus feel so strongly about the opportunity to debate issues, this function of the caucus should receive proper attention. Issue debate should be structured to make it as significant a part of the process as possible.

The platform should be clear and useful enough to present meaningful choices to average voters. Now, platforms do not provide the kind of practical help that is intended to assist the selection of candidates and evaluation of elected officials.

### POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO CAUCUS PARTICIPATION RESULTING FROM SOCIETAL FORCES

- Lack of general public understanding of and awareness about the caucus
- Inadequate time due to constraints on growing numbers of single-parent or two-wage earner families
- Less immutable identification with a major political party
- Feelings of powerlessness over workings of the political system
- Predominance of single-issue caucus participants

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RECOMMENDED CHANGES**

We believe the caucus can and should be improved but are not so optimistic as to think these improvements, by themselves, will automatically raise the level of informed citizen participation in our system of governance.

Therefore, we recommend that the community and the Citizens League:

- **Examine the fundamental forces that shape people's ability and willingness to involve themselves in the political process.**

Notwithstanding the outcome of that examination, to improve the caucus as an opportunity for informed participation in the political process, we recommend several changes. All but one are directed to the major political parties; the one exception is directed to the state. These recommendations are made with the intention of making the caucus better known to those unfamiliar with it, and more rewarding to those who participate.

In sum, the recommendations are:

- **simplify and clarify the caucus;**
- **encourage training for more of the caucus conveners;**
- **make better use of the caucus' half-hour waiting period;**
- **improve publicity and understanding of the caucus; and**
- **establish a state role in publicizing the caucus.**

The remainder of this chapter describes the recommendations in more detail. It starts with a challenge to look more deeply at the issues surrounding citizen democracy and concludes with recommended improvements to the caucus. This latter section divides the recommendations between those directed to the political parties and the one directed to the state.

### **EXAMINE THE BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE CITIZEN DEMOCRACY**

Although we believe the changes recommended later in this chapter are necessary to improve the caucus, we doubt that, by themselves, these changes are sufficient to change the bulk of the population's views about political involvement. People's sense of politics and their desire to be involved are a function of much larger forces than those that govern the caucus. Changes in the demographics of families and wage earners, the political parties themselves, the nature of communications, how candidates run for office, and campaign financing, have all contributed to changing perceptions about political involvement. These societal factors far outweigh the capacity of

the caucus to provide the level of informed political involvement we feel is important in our representative democracy.

This study was limited to the party caucus system. The recommendations of this report do not offer any fundamental alternatives for involvement in the political process. Nor do they address the extent to which opportunities for political involvement lie outside the caucus.

Because we feel strongly about the importance of citizens' involvement in the political process, we propose two courses of action:

- First, we believe additional attention should be paid to the caucus and how it fits in the context of the entire election process. We present in Chapter 4 other ideas and possible changes that arguably could improve Minnesota's caucus/convention system. We present them in the spirit of trying to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the possible changes. We do so without necessarily endorsing the measures or making claims as to their value for Minnesota.
- Second, we challenge ourselves and the community at large to examine the fundamental forces that shape people's ability and willingness to involve themselves in the political process. To this end, the Citizens League hopes to convene a study committee that will look at some of these questions. In particular, the committee would discuss whether there are structural barriers in the system in which people run for and get elected to public office; if so, it would ask whether these barriers prevent otherwise qualified candidates from seeking public office.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE CAUCUS

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES

We recommend that the major political parties take the following actions:

- Simplify and clarify the caucus by making the rules, procedures, and agenda more understandable and as simple as possible;
- improve how the caucus is publicized and work toward improving people's understanding of the caucus;
- make strong efforts to encourage all conveners to receive training prior to serving as caucus conveners; and
- make better use of the half-hour waiting period at the start of the caucus.

These recommendations are described in more detail below.

#### Simplify the Caucus

The parties should simplify and clarify the caucus by making the rules, procedures, and agenda more understandable and as simple as possible. This could include:

- streamlining the caucus by reducing repetitive actions;
- making the process less bureaucratic, less dependent on legalese, and more friendly; and

- eliminating or modifying certain procedures that complicate the meeting and tend to discourage the participation of ordinary persons unfamiliar with traditional caucus practices.

Each party should make its own comprehensive assessment of how its caucus could be made easier for people's participation.

Because many people attend the caucus out of their interest in debating issues and candidates, the caucus should be structured around these components to the extent possible. This doesn't mean dropping the other activities at the caucus but perhaps structuring them as secondary to issue debate and candidate discussion.

### **Improve Publicity and Understanding of the Caucus**

The parties should improve how the caucus is publicized and work toward improving people's understanding of the caucus. Better publicity is needed not only about the place, date, and time of the caucus, but also about the *reasons* for caucusing. The parties should reinforce people's notions and values about why it is important to be involved in this stage of the political process. (Later in this chapter we recommend a state role in publicizing the caucus to complement and reinforce the party efforts.)

Along this same vein, we commend the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and other general circulation newspapers around the state that publicize caucus locations. These newspapers provide valuable information links with their communities and potential caucus participants. We urge other dailies to follow suit.

The parties should emphasize special outreach to groups of people typically underrepresented at the caucus. For instance, to reach people of color, instead of relying solely on traditional methods of informing people about caucuses, the parties could identify and use information networks already at work in the various ethnic and racial communities. This implies more than advertising the caucus in newspapers published for certain minority or ethnic groups: It means working with representatives of these communities on initiatives to involve their members in the caucus. Again, the message should focus on what can be gained by attending, as well as the information on time and place.

A number of other tactics could be employed both prior to and on caucus day. Even simple efforts would be useful, such as:

- providing clear signage both inside and outside the building in which the caucus is being held.

Others include:

- distributing, prior to the event, the rules governing the caucus;
- running mock caucuses to edify people both about caucus procedures and timely issues;
- working with local schools to meet with students and provide hands-on learning about the caucus.

### **Encourage Convener Training**

The parties should make strong efforts to see that all conveners receive training prior to serving as caucus conveners. Because the success of the meeting is determined in part by how the caucus meeting is run, the major political parties should act aggressively to ensure that meeting conveners are skilled in managing a meeting. This responsibility should ultimately lie with the state offices of each major



political party, although the actual training is likely to be provided by the county unit chair in the DFL or the caucus coordinator for the basic political organizing unit in the IR.

All conveners serve as temporary chairs of the caucus. Some, but not all, conveners are elected by the caucus participants to chair the caucus. Obviously, in the cases where someone other than the convener is elected chair, advance training will not be much of an aid once the temporary chair relinquishes the post. Nonetheless, for the critical time at the start of the meeting, and for those precincts in which the convener serves as caucus chair, such training is crucial. It is the responsibility of the parties to ensure that the meetings are run as smoothly as possible, both for the sake of effectiveness and as a measured attempt to entice participants to return to future caucuses.

Training should emphasize the importance of assisting those caucus participants who haven't attended caucuses before and may not know what to expect. It should include:

- assisting conveners in acquiring or honing their meeting management skills or group process techniques;
- outlining the responsibilities and role of the chair;
- reviewing the purpose of the caucus so conveners can convey this to participants in easily understood language;
- making clearly understood the rules by which the caucus will proceed, as well as the state laws that apply;
- familiarizing conveners with the boundaries of the wards in subdivided precincts;
- reviewing the agenda; and
- assisting conveners with advance preparations to make the caucus flow as smoothly as possible.

### **Improve Use of the First Half Hour at the Caucus**

The parties should make better use of the half-hour waiting period required by law at the start of the caucus. We believe the waiting period should be retained; it makes the caucus a more forgiving event for people who want to participate but for whatever reason can not be on hand at the appointed 7:30 start time. However, its use can be improved. To experienced caucus attendees the waiting period may seem like wasted time; to newcomers unfamiliar with the law it may be viewed as lack of organization or simply as one more item in a long list of bureaucratic nuisances.

Although it is up to the parties themselves to decide what might enhance that half hour, some examples include:

- playing a well-produced video explaining what newcomers can expect or how individuals can use a caucus to advance their concerns or support for candidates, or
- introducing to voters the candidates and their positions on issues.

### **RECOMMENDATION TO THE STATE**

The Legislature has in the past regulated portions of the caucus to make it fair and accessible to all voting residents. Because of the caucus' importance as an avenue for political participation, we believe the state should take an additional step toward improving the caucus. We recommend that:

- **The Legislature require a state role in publicizing the party caucus.**

### State Role in Publicizing the Caucus

The Legislature should enact a law to require a state role in publicizing the caucus. The state's role should supplement, not replace, the efforts of the major political parties to publicize the caucus. As soon as financially practical, the Legislature should direct the Secretary of State to design a system of providing information about precinct caucuses and promoting participation in them.

We encourage the Secretary of State's office to work through private sector channels to publicize the caucus. For instance, notices describing the caucus and its purpose could be sent along with monthly utility bills; or the office could engage local newspapers in publicizing the caucus. Although the Secretary of State's office should be in charge of organizing such an information system, the office itself doesn't necessarily have to disseminate the information. The office could, for instance, work with the counties' auditor offices to ensure such information is provided.<sup>19</sup>

*Why require state publicity of the caucuses?* We believe the value of the caucus is such that the state should play an active role in notifying voters about it. Statewide notification and education about the caucus could enhance peoples' understanding of the caucus and encourage some, who have been hesitant in the past, to attend.

To be beneficial, the publicity would necessarily have to be educational and promotional as well as instructive about how voters can obtain information on the day, time, and place of the caucus. It should explain the purposes of the caucus and give voters a clear idea of what will happen at the meeting and what they can expect to be accomplished. Additionally, it should instruct voters how to obtain additional information about the precinct caucus of the party of their choice.

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<sup>19</sup> Currently, the county auditor is required to make available to those who request it, the information provided by the party's legislative-district chair regarding place, date, and time of the caucus.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ADDITIONAL OPTIONS FOR CHANGE**

Because the caucus is Minnesota's preeminent vehicle for participation in the political process, because it remains a very open and relatively visible way for persons to become politically involved, and because the state has used its regulatory power to govern it, we think the caucus must be improved, as suggested in Chapter 3. We acknowledge, however, that our recommendations are not likely to be the salvation for citizen democracy. Too many other factors also affect the level of political participation.

Nonetheless, because it holds such potential import while relatively few people attend, the caucus system deserves more public policy attention than it has received. Therefore, we present here other ideas that would change and arguably could improve Minnesota's party caucus and convention system. It is important to understand the advantages and disadvantages of alternatives to the way the caucus is now structured. We have not, however, made a judgment about their usefulness here. We offer them in an attempt to broaden the discussion that needs to occur regarding the caucus.

#### **POSSIBLE CHANGES**

Some of the following ideas apply exclusively to the one-evening precinct caucus; others apply to the entire caucus/convention system, including the primary election now held in September. The ideas are grouped accordingly.

If any of the following ideas are determined to be feasible, in most cases it would seem preferable for the parties to try a demonstration of the idea, perhaps in different parts of the state, to test people's receptivity to it before implementing it on a larger scale.

#### **IDEAS THAT APPLY TO THE CAUCUS ONLY**

##### **Holding a Non-Partisan Forum for Issue Discussion**

A non-partisan forum that focuses exclusively on issues would respond to the strong feelings about the importance in the caucus of raising and debating issues. A separate forum for this purpose would raise the prominence of this debate. The issues forum would provide people with an opportunity to learn more about certain issues, enhance the level of debate at the precinct caucus, and could ultimately provide more meaning to the parties' platforms.

Although this idea could be implemented in a number of ways, one application is as follows. The intent would be to educate people on a number of issues as a primer for the caucus. The political parties could work within a legislative district in combination with a local political science department, local high school, civic groups and/or others interested in the idea. Together these people would hold a forum to which the public would be invited for issue debate, approximately one week prior to the caucus.

At the forum certain issues would be highlighted, with two or three resource people presenting different points of view on the topic, and allowing time for the audience to ask questions. Following this session, party members could congregate (in separate rooms) to debate what position they feel the party should take on the issues.

Prior to the event the parties would decide which issues to discuss. Party leaders in each party could determine among themselves what four or five issues should command priority in any given year. These issues would become the focus of the discussions at the forum.

Later at the caucus, resolutions on these issues could be the focus of the debate. Caucus participants would be free to bring up any other issues but they would attend knowing these four or five specific issues would be addressed. The issues forum would not replace the debate at the caucus, but rather would enable more informed debate of certain important topics.

A downside to the idea is that the debate at a forum would not be tied to any specific results in the community or by the party. Its main purpose is the edification of the individual. If people do not see a potential for positive results from the forum, it's questionable whether they would attend. In contrast, the debate at the caucus today leads to specific action by the party, and ultimately, to the development of the party platform.

In addition, the historical record indicates it might be difficult to bring together members of the two major political parties to plan such an event, or to agree on which issues to highlight.

### **Instituting Alternate Year Caucuses**

This idea would separate and highlight the issue-discussion function of the caucus from other functions. One of several ways to do this is as follows: In an odd-numbered year, caucus participants would debate issues, elect party officials, and conduct other party business. In an even-numbered year, caucus participants would select delegates to nominating conventions.<sup>20</sup>

Such a system would give everyone a chance to participate in whatever function of the caucus he or she felt was most important, or to participate in all functions if they desired.

Reserving one of the two years for issue debate could focus the proper attention on this important function. Debating the issues would not have to play second fiddle to selecting delegates. The platform developed from this process could be used the following year to evaluate candidates.

However, the expense and time involved with setting up nearly twice as many caucus meetings as we have today would have to be considered. Furthermore, if scarce time is as much of a constraint in the future as it appears today, participants may resist establishing a second set of meetings in the alternate year.

### **Eliminating the Half-Hour Waiting Period at the Beginning of the Caucus**

Because state law requires caucus participants to refrain from voting in the first half-hour of the start of the caucus, some feel this time is essentially "down time" or wasted time. It is thought to contribute to the seemingly unnecessary and time-consuming procedures that could detract from caucus attendance.

Eliminating that waiting period would be relatively easy, although it requires a change in state law and would have perhaps only a minimal impact on participation. Doing so, however, could create an unintended consequence: If voting begins right at 7:30, it could prevent those who do manage to come

<sup>20</sup> In some parts of the state today a major political party already holds caucuses in the odd-numbered year to act on local issues and candidates.

to the meeting, albeit late, from participating in the main business at hand. Making better use of that half-hour is addressed in Chapter 3.

### Changing Proportional Representation Voting

Proportional representation voting, sometimes referred to as the walking subcaucus process, has been used to select DFL delegates when more people are interested in serving as a delegate than there are positions open. (A brief explanation of this voting process is in Chapter 1.)

The proportional voting method guarantees that even those representing minority viewpoints will have a voice. Minority support for an issue or particular candidate will not disappear completely as it could with a majority rule vote. However, it has been criticized as overly complex, confusing, and time consuming, especially for people new to the caucus. It produces splinter groups, each focusing on its own candidate, instead of on the candidate most likely to win for the party. It can lead to dissension among party members, rather than consensus. It can also produce frivolous subcaucuses that divert attention and time from more important caucus business.

If an alternative is desirable, it should be easier to understand and use, yet still protect minority interests.

A possible replacement is a system in which the number of subcaucuses is prescribed and the subcaucuses must interact with the full caucus. The number of subcaucuses could be a pre-determined percentage of caucus participants. For instance, with a 25 percent subcaucus limit, a caucus of 100 people would have to maintain subcaucuses of at least 25 members. This would prevent the proliferation of superfluous subcaucuses. Each subcaucus would submit two names for each position to be filled. The full caucus would have to consider and vote on the recommendations of each subcaucus, approving only one of the two names recommended. The subcaucus would have to present candidates it believes a majority of all caucus attendees could support. In this way, each position would be filled by someone nominated by a subcaucus and ratified by the full caucus.

### Resolving Time Conflicts with Caucus Night

Some believe that people often have other meetings, events, or commitments that conflict with the 7:30 p.m. Tuesday evening of the caucus. To the extent this is the case, the following three suggestions are possible ways of working around those time conflicts. Whether greater participation would result is something that would have to be tested.

**Changing the Day on Which the Caucus is Held.** Minnesota's caucus has been held on Tuesday evenings for many years. Changing the caucus to some other evening during the traditional work week isn't likely to increase attendance, but some believe a caucus held on a *weekend* would give more people the chance to participate. A weekend date might be more acceptable to larger numbers of people.

Unfortunately, both Saturday and Sunday have potential religious conflicts. Even though party conventions are typically (though not exclusively) held on Saturdays, Saturdays pose a conflict for traditional Jewish people. Sundays are usually the days for many Christian churches' worship. And although the entire Sunday is usually not reserved for this purpose, it poses a potential conflict that could exclude some persons from participating.

There is some value in keeping the caucus on the same night around the state; consistency makes it easier for people to remember and plan for the caucus.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> The state has not always required the parties to hold the caucus on the same evening statewide. Prior to 1969 the caucus night had to be uniform only within a county. The Legislature that year established the fourth Tuesday in February of the general election year as precinct caucus night throughout Minnesota.

**Strengthening the Enforcement of the Prohibition Against Scheduling Other Public Meetings on Caucus Evening.** Although state law already prohibits certain public meetings after 6:00 on precinct caucus evening, some people say the requirement is not rigidly followed. For instance, the statutes prohibit the University of Minnesota from scheduling events after 6:00 p.m. unless the board of regents approves it; yet classes meet that evening. One not-so-tongue-in-cheek suggestion has been to cut the state aid to any public body that does not strictly follow this law.

A more rigorous enforcement of the law could lessen potential conflicts with the caucus event. Whether or not more people would choose to attend their caucus as a result, however, is not clear. The potential gain in participation would have to be weighed against the costs of the added enforcement.

**Holding the Caucus on More Than One Night Per Year.** Another way to resolve the possible problem of time conflicts is to hold more than one each election year so persons who can not attend one night could attend some other night, perhaps a week or two later. Such an arrangement could allow more people to participate, and as importantly, it would allow the candidates to speak to and meet more of the voters and potential delegates. This could enhance attendees' opportunities to evaluate and make judgments about aspiring candidates.

However, the administrative and logistical problems of holding a series of caucus nights would be great. Certain functions simply could not be divided over two different evenings. It would be virtually impossible to elect some delegates one night and the rest at the following week's caucus, unless some form of pre-registration were required that indicated how many persons would be in attendance each night. Another problem is the potential for one person to attend more than one caucus in an attempt to weigh in their opinions more heavily than others, or vote twice.

## IDEAS THAT APPLY TO THE CAUCUS/CONVENTION SYSTEM

### Changing the Primary to a Runoff Election

Under this system, the primary election would select two candidates, regardless of party, to compete in the general election. One ballot would list candidates from all parties at the primary election; the top two vote-getters would go on to the general election. The major political parties would endorse only one candidate; that candidate would carry the party's label on the ballot.<sup>22</sup> Others vying for the position would have to organize and attain a substantial number of signatures to get on the primary ballot. They would be listed on the ballot with some party designation other than DFL or IR.

This idea is proposed as a way to increase political participation. It could provide a direct connection between the work of the caucus and the results at the primary. Plus, candidates who do not win the major political party endorsement would have to organize political support just to get on the ballot. It could encourage greater primary election participation because of the wider range of candidates on the ballot.

It is also seen as a way to better define the role of a party member and make the work of party activists more meaningful. It would reward the work of the party activists who, after a deliberative process, would be able to place their candidate on the ballot with their party endorsement.

Opponents say the existing primary system works well as a check and balance with the parties' candidate endorsements. They fear that some of the advantages of our two-party system would be lost under the new arrangement. For instance, in this system the potential for two Democratic gubernatorial candidates running against one another in the general election is very real. (Only one could bear the DFL label; the other could not be DFL, even though his/her ideology and positions could be closely

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<sup>22</sup> Today, parties may endorse a candidate, but that endorsement is not listed on the ballot next to the candidate's name.

aligned with Democratic principles.) Presenting voters with two candidates of similar ideology distorts the reasons for having competitive elections in the first place. In this case, voters won't be given a real choice of plans and policies. They would have to choose a candidate based on differences in nuance instead of differences in values and policy positions.

Minority groups could have cause for concern in that run-off elections could lead to under-representation of minorities in public offices.

Another concern is that the new system would encourage intra-party dissension and the formation of new political parties as splinter groups form around candidates who lose the endorsement. The preponderance of many smaller, active parties could lead to a dysfunctional multi-party system where public officials are elected with only small pluralities. Contributing to this trend of a factional, multi-party system is the effect of allowing voters to vote for a candidate of one party for one position and a candidate of another party for other positions.

### Changing the Date of the Primary

Several arguments are made to move the primary from September to an earlier month, June being the month most frequently mentioned. One is the need to even the playing field for candidates who are challenging incumbents: such challengers, particularly those without party endorsements, usually lack the financial and organizational resources to run a campaign through to September. As a result, the system works to the advantage of the endorsed incumbent at the expense of a challenger.

Moving the primary closer to the date of the caucus could help connect the caucus participants' actions with direct results. In this way the value of participating in the caucus is enhanced, and in turn, people may have a greater incentive to participate.

A change in the primary election date could force the parties to simplify the caucus/convention system in order to accommodate the shorter time frame necessitated by an earlier primary. Simplifying this process could lead to more interest in participating in the precinct caucus.

In addition, shortening the length of time available for campaigning has advantages. Many citizens feel the campaign season lasts too long as it is, and would welcome a shorter campaign. Serious candidates will have already begun their organizing and campaigning; they need not wait to begin in earnest until after the state conventions.

Those who argue to keep the existing primary date say that moving the primary to a June date, for example, would not help but would instead hurt the chances of a candidate challenging an incumbent, particularly for candidates vying for statewide positions. The campaigning time for statewide candidates would be so short (approximately two or three weeks after the state endorsing convention) that relatively unknown candidates would have difficulty informing voters about their views or otherwise making themselves known to citizens.

In that short time frame, candidates would also find it difficult to raise the money needed to run a viable campaign. Furthermore, the short period between the state convention and primary might be insufficient for healing what can be fragmentary intra-party fighting over endorsements.

A June primary could be problematic for the scheduling of the earlier components of the candidate endorsement process -- the precinct caucus, and the subsequent conventions at the county or legislative district level, the congressional district, and the state. A certain amount of time is necessary simply to handle all the planning, administration, and logistics of those meetings. Moving the primary to June would make it difficult to effectively maintain each layer of that process.

Holding a primary in July or August could conflict with the times that many people are out of town because of vacations and other events. Despite the opportunity for absentee voting, this conflict could reduce the prospects for voter turnout. It could also affect the ability of candidates to drum up volunteer support for phone banks and other campaign volunteer activities.

Even if primary election campaigns were shortened by moving the primary election date, campaigning wouldn't necessarily decrease. The campaigns for the general election would likely expand to fill the time between June and November.

### Limiting the Number of Items on the Party's Platform

As a way of making party platforms more meaningful, some suggest whittling the platform down to a relatively small number of essential components. A limited platform focusing on a smaller number of issues could help promote party cohesiveness, and provide an easily identifiable way of distinguishing party priorities. As one example of how this could be done, the parties could determine the most important policy areas for the party and make these known to caucus participants. The participants could choose to debate any topic they felt was important, but would do so knowing whether or not the issue was a priority that year. Making the platform a more useful and usable document would give both the party and voters a measuring stick to judge candidates and evaluate elected officials.

However, limiting the size of the platform could be viewed as an attempt to limit what many people say is a key reason they attend caucuses -- public debate of issues. Even if people have a long list of concerns, they should be heard and the platform should reflect those concerns if a majority of party members share them. It may be more important to have people discuss all their issues than to shorten the platform and exclude potentially important issues.

### Using Multiple Endorsements

A system of multiple endorsements would allow candidates to get on a party's primary ballot without acquiring 60 percent support at the convention, as is the case today in Minnesota. With multiple endorsements, candidates for a statewide office could get on the primary ballot by gathering a threshold level of support (e.g., 25 percent) at the party's state convention.

Candidates could not file as a Democrat or a Republican without the blessing of the party -- as measured by the threshold level of support at the convention. (Today, any candidate can call him or herself a DFLer or an IR even without the party's endorsement.) Candidates could, however, get on the ballot without delegate support by attaining a significant number of signatures. This process would put a number of candidates before the primary election electorate. It would diminish the risk of the party putting forth a single candidate who may satisfy active party members but prove unacceptable to the larger primary electorate. It also requires the potential candidates to demonstrate they have some support before their name goes on the ballot; currently, anyone seeking the party nomination who files the appropriate papers and pays the filing fee can get on the primary ballot.

The system of multiple endorsements is typically associated with moving the primary election date closer to the time of the state convention than is the case in Minnesota, usually to temper what could be excessive campaign expense by the several candidates.

Opponents of a multiple endorsement system say the value of a party's endorsement is reduced if the endorsement is spread among more than one candidate. They fear that people will not participate in the caucus/convention process unless their actions translate into meaningful results -- and that the results are less meaningful if persons outside the convention have as much control over naming candidates as those at the convention. They say the party activists should be able to present their collective judgment about the single most viable candidate to primary election voters. Furthermore, some view multiple endorsements as a potential end run around the precinct caucus/convention process. It gives a "second chance" to candidates who fail to win 60 percent of the convention support as they do today.



### Changing to a Closed Primary

Minnesota could replace its direct and open primary with a closed primary, requiring voters to register so that only registered DFLers vote for Democratic candidates, and only registered IR members vote for Republican candidates. (Most other states have closed primaries.) In fact, Minnesota has already taken this step for the presidential preference primary, to be instituted in 1992; voters will have to request either a democratic or republican ballot to vote their preference for a presidential candidate. (See Appendix 3 for additional details.)

Minnesota's primary is the mechanism for deciding which candidate will become the nominee for each political party.<sup>23</sup> Advocates of a closed primary say that because this candidate will represent the party and, in effect, become an extension of it as the party's nominee, the party has an interest in putting forth its best candidate to ensure its chances of winning the general election. Consequently, the primary should be the opportunity for persons who declare themselves to be of one party or another to vote for who will best represent their party. Now, a person of any political persuasion can vote in the primary to decide who will be the party's designee.

In addition, nothing in today's system prohibits crossover voting, whereby supporters of one candidate cross party lines to vote in the other party's primary in the hopes of electing the weaker of the candidates from the opposing party.

Some advocates of the closed primary suggest structuring it with minimal inconvenience to the public. Voters could be required to state their party affiliation when they register to vote. They would then receive only the ballot on which their party's candidates are listed. In this way, the public nature of one's party declaration at the polling place is minimized. Furthermore, voters could be given the opportunity to change their party affiliation from one year to the next. A change of party affiliation could be permitted right at the polling place.

Under a closed primary, Minnesota voters would have to publicly declare allegiance with a party; currently, they declare their party affiliation in the privacy of the voting booth. Those opposed to closing the primary argue that party registration runs against the grain of Minnesotans' affinity for independence and privacy in voting matters. To some, party registration carries the appearance of coercion and outside influences on the voter.

Furthermore, because voter lists are public information, names of voters, their addresses, and party affiliation would be open to inspection. Voter lists are available to anyone willing and able to pay for the cost of reproduction. By law the only limitation on the use of the voting rosters is a prohibition against using the information for purposes unrelated to elections, political activities, or law enforcement.

Opponents say because the state controls the primary it ought to provide what is best for the public interest, which may or may not be the principal interest of the political parties. Unlike the precinct caucus which is largely controlled by the parties, the statewide primary election is strictly governed by state statutes. It determines the nominees for both partisan and non-partisan offices to be filled at the general election. It should be structured in such a way as to reflect the voters' will in nominating the best candidates, not necessarily to strengthen the political parties.

Some fear that a closed primary will be detrimental to voter turnout because people may not care to align themselves with one or the other of the major political parties. Many Minnesotans may be interested in voting even though they are not interested in being identified with either of the major political parties.

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<sup>23</sup> *Minn. Stat.* (1990) §204D.10, subd. 1.

### Electing Delegates Directly on the Primary Ballot

For the 1988 presidential election, delegates in seven states were sent to the national convention on the basis of how many votes they received in the primary election, independent of the votes received by the actual candidate. In other states, delegates' names may be on the ballot but whether they go to the convention may be tied to the vote the candidate receives.<sup>24</sup>

Direct election of the delegates is suggested as a way to make the delegate selection process more open and available to the parties' electorates, instead of limiting it to only those who attend the precinct caucus. It is also seen as a way to even out attendance at the caucus by reducing the influence the presidential election year has.

However, such a change in Minnesota could be expected to require enormous time, energy, and money in additional campaigning. It could mean lengthening the primary ballot considerably to elect all the delegates to the national conventions. And it could contribute to voter confusion in elections that some persons contend already have too many races.

### Shortening the caucus/convention process

A shorter caucus/convention process could entice more people to participate knowing that they would not have to commit three weekends and a weeknight over a drawn out period of five months. However, this means eliminating one of the stages now used: precinct, county/legislative district, congressional district, or the state. Losing one of them would necessarily mean losing an important part of the business conducted in the caucus/convention process. For example, eliminating the county/legislative district convention would either eliminate the endorsements for legislative races or force that business into either the precinct caucus night or the congressional district convention, both of which would add additional important business to events already fully scheduled.

A variation of this would compress the caucus/convention process into a shorter time-frame while keeping all of its existing components. For instance, the county/legislative district convention and congressional district convention could occur on the first and final weekends in a month. By so doing, the process would not appear so drawn out or daunting to potential delegates. Furthermore, a shortened process would provide more of a direct link between the work of the caucus and the results leading into the primary. However, time is needed to complete the intervening planning and administrative work required before the next step in the process; a compression of the process may not allow sufficient time to attend to these details.

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<sup>24</sup> Each state has a slightly different system. Some states use primaries wherein delegates pledge themselves to a particular candidate and run on that basis; in others the delegates are not formally pledged to a presidential candidate. Some states use the primary to both elect delegates and indicate a preference for presidential candidates; others use the presidential primary as a presidential preference vote only. For more information see Frank Sorauf, *Party Politics in America*, Fifth Edition, 1984.

# APPENDIX 1

## NATIONAL PARTY RULES GOVERNING DELEGATE SELECTION, 1988 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

RULE	DEMOCRATIC PARTY	REPUBLICAN PARTY
<i>Method of delegate selection</i>	(1) Caucus/convention system, of one to four tiers; (2) direct primary election; (3) pre-primary caucus; (4) post-primary caucus; (5) two-party primary, in which voters vote for president <i>and</i> delegates.	(1) Primary election; (2) the Republican state committee, where specifically provided by state law; (3) or any method consistent with 1984 state rules. <sup>25</sup>
<i>Timing of selection process</i>	First stage of nominating process may not occur before second Tuesday in March or after second Tuesday in June (1988). <sup>26</sup>	Delegates are eligible only if elected after the date of the issuance of the call of the Republican national convention.
<i>Eligibility for participation</i>	Must be Democratic voters who publicly declare their party preference and have their preference publicly recorded.	Must be legal and qualified voters deemed to be Republican according to state law or party rules. State Republican committees may prescribe other qualifications.
<i>Allocation of delegates to candidates</i>	(1) Proportional representation, whereby delegates are allocated in proportion to percentage of primary or caucus vote in the district; (minimum 15 percent of vote is required); (2) Bonus delegate, whereby one delegate is awarded to winner in the district and remaining delegates allocated via proportional representation; (3) Direct election primaries, whereby delegates are voted for directly on primary ballot.	State party rules govern the procedures.

<sup>25</sup> Election of delegates to congressional district conventions (as contrasted with the national convention) may be elected in precinct caucuses, mass meetings, mass conventions, or county conventions.

<sup>26</sup> There were four exceptions to this rule in 1988: Iowa, New Hampshire, Maine, and Wyoming. South Dakota and Minnesota were found to be in noncompliance with the timing rule; consequently, South Dakota had to reaffirm its early primary results at a later date, and Minnesota was unable to report its results until after March 8.

## APPENDIX 2

# RESULTS OF CAUCUS QUESTIONNAIRE

The Citizens League mailed to all its members a special newsletter called the *Caucus Matters*. The *Caucus Matters* included a questionnaire to elicit opinions about the caucuses. We received 325 responses, about 10 percent of the members. It should be noted that the results can not be used to generalize about all Citizens League members or the population as a whole.

### SUMMARY

Of the 325 respondents, 62 percent attended a caucus in 1990 and 38 percent did not. Those that attended were active in the party and generally satisfied with the caucus. The biggest point of dissatisfaction with the caucuses was the lack of opportunity to talk with candidates. When asked what they'd change, the largest group said: *Eliminate domination of the caucus by single-interest groups*.

Those that did not attend said they stayed away because they either had no tie to either of the two major political parties, they felt their attendance would have no impact, or they believed that caucuses are really for insiders. When asked what it would take to get them to attend a 1992 caucus, the largest plurality said they would have to have a better understanding of what would happen and what would be expected of them. Some said they already plan to attend, and another group of equal size said they'd go if they knew that an issue they feel strongly about would be embraced by others.

### THOSE WHO ATTENDED A CAUCUS IN 1990

Most of those who attended a caucus were active in the party in some way other than simply participating in caucuses. About two-thirds (64 percent) were involved in the party in the past four years, either in a leadership role or some other capacity.

### WHY PEOPLE ATTENDED A CAUCUS

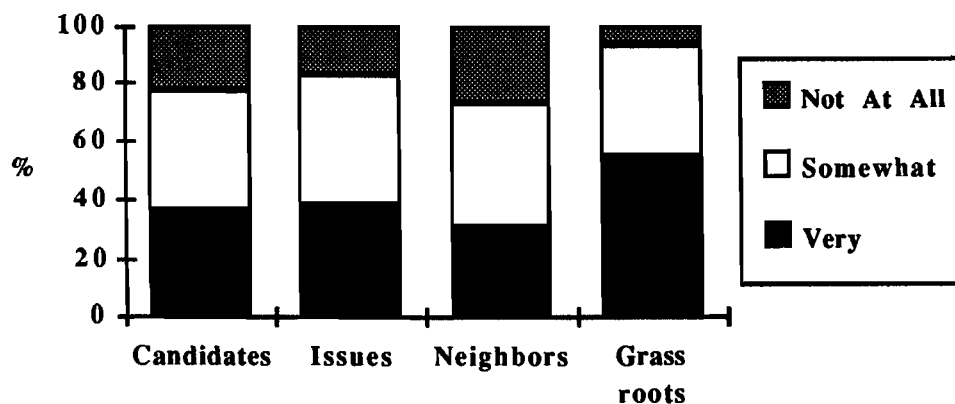
The opportunity to support issues was the number one reason why people attended caucuses; 71 percent indicated this was a reason they attended. Sixty-two percent cited a sense of civic duty as a reason to attend. Fifty-three percent said the chance to support a candidate was an important reason to attend. Thirty percent said they attended because it is important to party vitality.

### LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE CAUCUS

The attendees indicated a good deal of satisfaction with their caucuses. (See Chart A-1.) Fifty-five percent said their caucus was very effective in giving them a role in grass roots political activity; 38 percent said their caucus was somewhat effective in giving them this role. About 36 and 42 percent, respectively, were very or somewhat satisfied with the opportunity to influence candidate selection. About 38 and 45 percent, respectively, were very or somewhat satisfied with the opportunity to raise

CHART A-1

**PERCENT OF 1990 CAUCUS ATTENDEES INDICATING  
LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH CAUCUS OPPORTUNITIES\***



\*The Candidates column in this chart refers to the "opportunity to influence which candidates are endorsed for office." Issues refers to the "opportunity to raise and debate important issues." Neighbors refers to the "opportunity to gather with neighbors and discuss common problems." Grass roots refers to the "opportunity to have a role in grass roots political activity."

and debate issues. About 31 and 42 percent, respectively, were very or somewhat satisfied with the opportunity to discuss common problems with their neighbors.

Only seven percent said the caucus was not at all effective in giving an opportunity to have a grass roots role in political activity. The percent who said the caucus was not at all effective for giving them an opportunity to influence the endorsement of candidates, debating issues, or gathering with neighbors to discuss common problems, was 22, 17, and 27 percent, respectively.

### WHAT WAS LEAST DESIRABLE ABOUT THE CAUCUS

When asked to describe what part of the caucus they found least desirable, the largest number (25 percent) said "little opportunity to talk with or about candidates." (See Chart A-2.) Fifteen percent said the "length of the meeting" was least desirable. Twelve percent disliked the time spent electing local party officials.

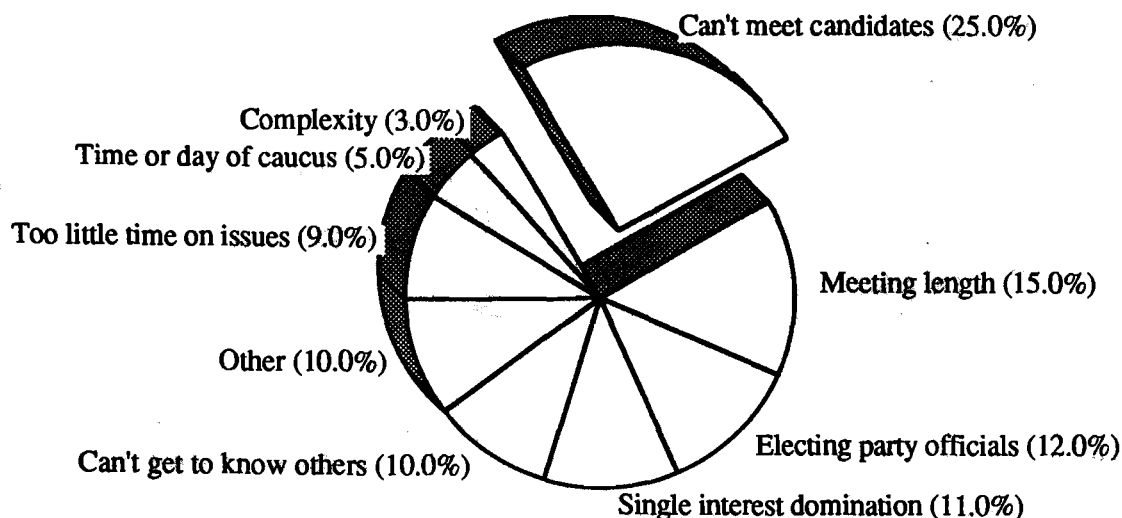
Half of those who *wrote in* a complaint under the "Other" category disliked the domination of single-interest groups; these responses accounted for 11 percent of all the responses regarding least desirable parts of the caucus. Ten percent disliked that they could not meet and get to know other participants. Three percent of the attendees *wrote in* complaints about the complex, hard-to-understand procedures.

### WHAT WOULD THE CAUCUS ATTENDEES CHANGE

The questionnaire asked in an open-ended question what, if anything, those who attended would change about the precinct caucus system. One hundred and sixty-three persons responded. Considering only the first item mentioned (some people wrote in several features they would change), the largest number (18 percent) wrote in they would get rid of the single interest groups that tended to dominate. (See Chart A-3.)

CHART A-2

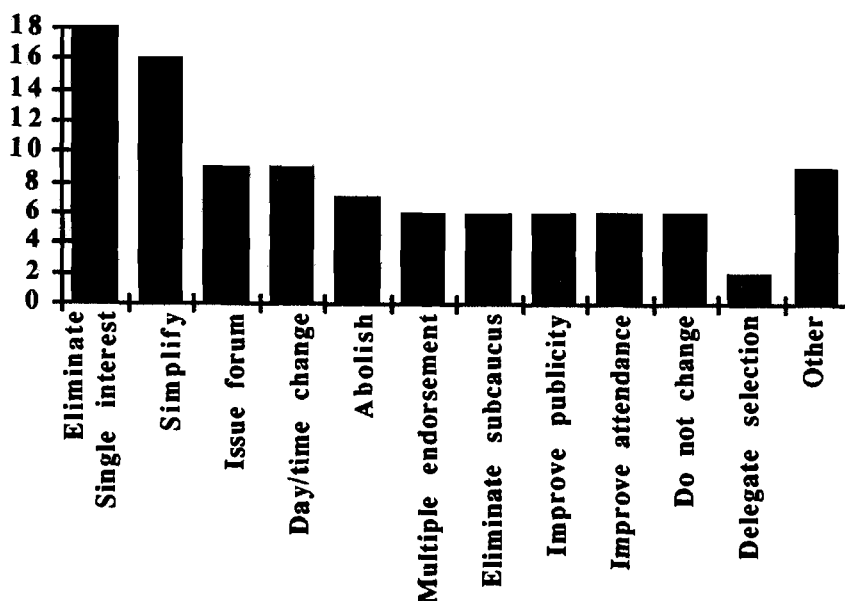
**PERCENT OF RESPONSES ON  
LEAST DESIRABLE FEATURES OF CAUCUSES**



The second largest number wrote in: **simplify** the caucus. This included simplifying the rules, eliminating the bureaucratic procedures and tedious parts of the caucus, and making the caucus more understandable and welcoming for newcomers. Two other changes tied for the next largest pluralities: Equal numbers of people (nine percent each of the responses) recommended making the caucus a better forum for discussing issues or changing the day or time of the caucus.

CHART A-3

**PERCENT RECOMMENDING SPECIFIC CHANGES TO THE CAUCUS**



Seven percent called for **abolishing** the caucus. Equal numbers of respondents (six percent each) wrote in: use **multiple endorsements**, **eliminate subcaucusing**, improve the **publicity and education** about caucuses, get **better attendance**, or the caucus **should not be changed**.

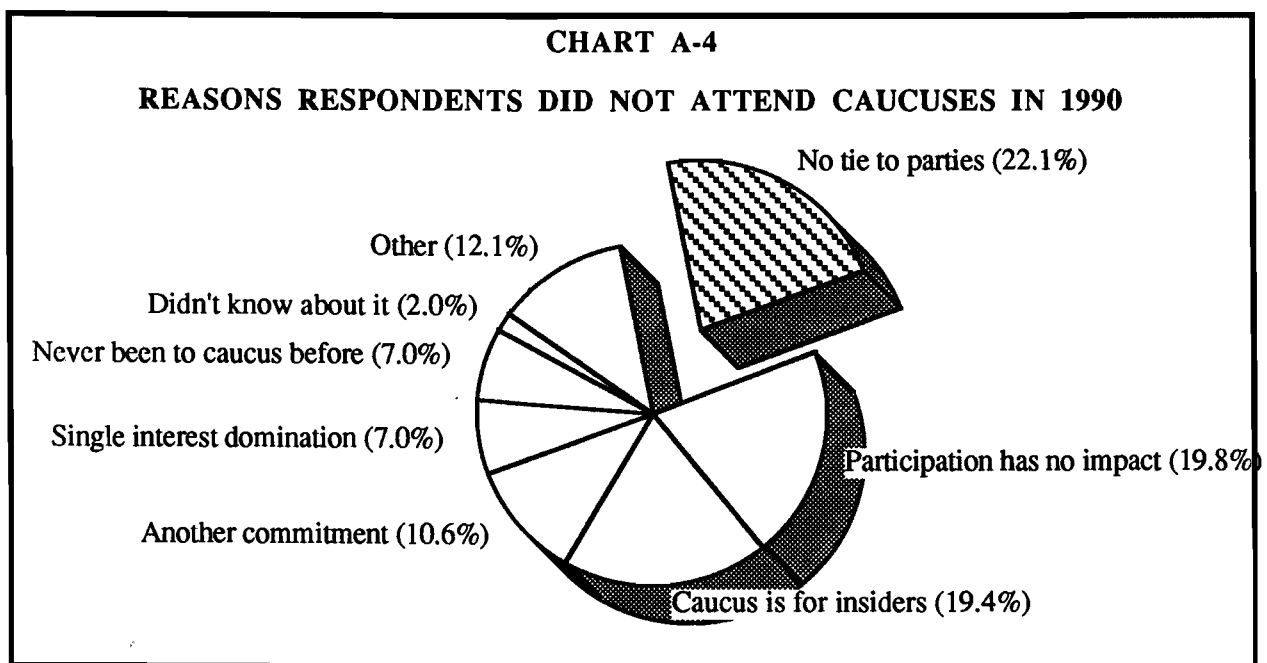
## THOSE WHO DID NOT ATTEND A CAUCUS IN 1990

Of the 325 respondents, 124 people, or 38 percent, did not attend a caucus in 1990. This does not mean that these respondents *never* attended a caucus; in fact, many of these people wrote in that they had attended in past years.

### REASONS WHY THEY DID NOT ATTEND

Many people did not attend because they either had no tie to either of the two major political parties, or they felt their attendance would have no impact, or they believed that caucuses are really for insiders. (See Chart A-4.)

Of the 38 percent of respondents who did *not* attend a caucus, the largest group (22 percent) said one reason they did not attend is they had no affiliation with the political parties or disagreed with the philosophical stands of the parties.



Another 20 percent said one reason they did not attend was that their participation would not have made an impact. Another nearly 20 percent said they did not attend because caucuses are really for "insiders." Nearly 11 percent had another commitment the evening of the caucus.

Seven percent *wrote in* they did not attend because of single interest group domination. Seven percent did not attend because they had not been to one before.

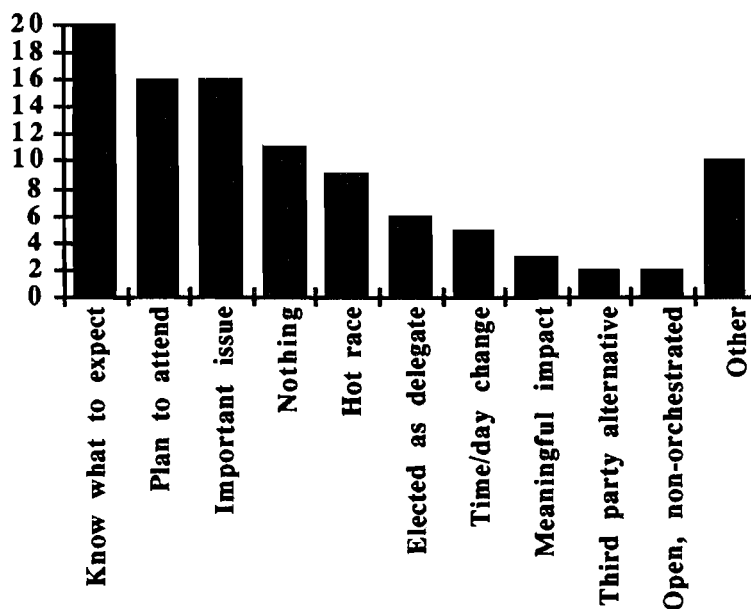
## WHAT HAS TO CHANGE TO GET THE RESPONDENTS TO ATTEND FUTURE CAUCUSES

Many people would go to a caucus if they knew ahead of time what was expected of them, or if they knew that an issue they feel strongly about would be a priority item. (See Chart A-5.)

Specifically, to get them to attend a caucus in 1992, the largest plurality (20 percent) said they would have to have a better understanding of what would happen and what would be expected of them. The next largest pluralities were tied. Equal numbers of people (16 percent each) replied: they would go if they knew that an issue they feel strongly about would be embraced by others or a candidate, or they already plan to attend.

CHART A-5

PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS INDICATING WHAT CHANGES ARE NEEDED TO GET THEM TO ATTEND CAUCUS IN 1992



Eleven percent said nothing could get them to attend a caucus in the future.

Nine percent said they would go if there were a hotly contested race for a political office. Six percent said they'd want to be elected a delegate if they attend. Five percent said they'd go if it were scheduled for a different time or day of the week. Three percent *wrote in* they'd go if they had a sense that it would have a meaningful impact. Two percent wrote in they'd go if the caucus was not an "orchestrated affair" with pre-ordained outcomes, and another two percent wrote in they'd go if a third party alternative were available.



## APPENDIX 3

### MINNESOTA'S PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE PRIMARY

The 1990 Legislature passed a law modifying the state's presidential primary established by the 1989 Legislature. The law changes the date of the presidential primary from February to the first Tuesday in April. Minnesota voters will test this presidential preference primary for the first time in 1992. Not since 1956 have Minnesotans voted their preference for presidential candidates in a primary election.

Unlike the law governing the September primary for candidates running for statewide offices, the presidential primary law requires voters to request the ballot of a specific party. However, it allows voters at the primary to vote for uncommitted delegates to the national party convention, if they do not want to vote for the candidates listed on the party's ballot.

The results of the primary voting will be used to apportion the delegates to the national convention of each political party. Delegates will be apportioned in proportion to the candidates' respective vote totals.

The law states that the state convention or congressional district convention of each party will select delegates to attend its national convention. At the national convention, delegates must vote for the candidate on the first ballot, unless the candidate releases the delegates' obligation.

Minnesota enacted a presidential primary in 1916 but abandoned it thereafter. It also held presidential primaries twice in the 1950s, but again abandoned them in 1957. Both parties were shaken by the results of primary elections: the Republicans in 1952 and the Democrats in 1956. In 1952 the Republican-endorsed candidate Harold Stassen won by a very small margin -- 20,000 votes -- over *write-in* candidate Dwight Eisenhower. In 1956 the Democratic party nominated Adlai Stevenson for president but voters in the primary backed Estaus Kefauver. These results were enough of a setback to party leaders to convince legislators to repeal the presidential primary in 1957. From that time up to the present, Minnesota has used the party caucus/convention system to select delegates to the national convention.

## APPENDIX 4

### RESULTS OF CITIZENS LEAGUE *SPEAK UPS*

#### WHAT THE *SPEAK UPS* ARE

On January 10, 1991 the Citizens League held *Speak Ups*, small group discussions of the caucus system, at 11 homes of League members around the metropolitan region. The *Speak Ups* were intended to provide members an opportunity to learn about and debate the caucus topic without serving on the study committee. All Citizens League members were invited to participate; over 240 people registered, and about 120 people actually attended. Most but not all had attended caucuses in 1990. The following describes the results of the *Speak Ups*.

#### OVERVIEW OF THE RESULTS OF THE *SPEAK UPS*

All but one of the 11 groups suggested retaining the current system with some modifications. The other group thought the problems of the caucus were symptomatic of larger problems with the election process and society in general and thought solutions ought to address these overarching problems.

#### COMMON PROBLEMS

All but three of the problems talked about in the *Speak Ups* were *procedural* in nature. The problems of a *legal* nature had to do with the inflexibility of the day on which caucuses are held, the scheduling of other public meetings on caucus night, and shortening the caucus/convention process.

The problem most commonly mentioned was the dominance of caucuses by special, single-interests. Many of the groups said the chairs at the caucuses were ill-prepared to manage the meetings. Often mentioned was inadequate notice or publicity of the caucuses prior to and at the actual event. Many said the discussion of issues was very important but receiving less attention than it should. The groups said that most citizens do not understand caucuses, and believe they work for insiders only. Newcomers are not welcomed. The opportunity to meet and speak with candidates is very limited. Platforms have become essentially irrelevant.

Certain procedures of the caucuses were mentioned as problems by one or more of the *Speak Up* groups: the time-consuming and divisive subcaucusing; time spent on bureaucratic procedures reduced the effectiveness of the caucus; sudden rule changes; the length of the meeting and length of the process in its entirety; conducting party business is uninteresting and turns people off.

#### SUGGESTED CHANGES

Although the *Speak Up* groups thought the caucus should be retained, all believed some changes are necessary.

The suggested changes are not mutually exclusive, and some directly conflict with others. For instance, one group said the caucus should focus on issue discussion, and another said issue discussion should occur outside the caucus in an entirely different forum.

The changes can be categorized around these themes:

- *improve general public knowledge about caucuses;*
- *change what goes on during the caucus and how it is conducted;*
- *change framework/logistics of the meeting;*
- *other.*

They are summarized in Table A-1 on the following page.

## SUMMARIES OF THE *SPEAK UPS* BY REGION

### REGION 1 -- NORTHEAST METRO

Everyone in this group said they wanted to retain the caucus system but make some changes. Twelve people participated in the *Speak Up*, all of whom attended caucuses in 1990.

#### Problems

The group identified the biggest problem as the lack of a concerned citizenry which allows special interests to take over. The range of issues is too broad, precluding in-depth discussion of issues. Chairs are inept at managing the meeting. Caucuses are losing their value for legislators. The intent of the subcaucuses is fine but the practice is abused. Sudden rule changes announced by the chair appear capricious. Insufficient notice and publicity about the caucuses.

#### Objectives

Caucuses should serve as a neighborhood forum. They allow participation by people who wouldn't otherwise participate in the political process. Caucuses can provide the opportunity to learn about others' perceptions on issues.

#### Suggested Changes

Regarding Procedures: Prevent other public meetings from occurring on caucus night, e.g., Metro Council meetings. Use consistent locations for the caucus, and provide major "signage" both inside and outside the building. Notices of the meetings should go out earlier. Distribute widely the rules that govern the caucus and educate people about caucuses. A short video on the rules of the caucus, how it is run, and what can be expected would help. A plenary session with both parties represented could explain how the caucuses work. Use professional facilitators to run the meetings; conveners could be trained on cable Regional Channel 6. Establish a bi-partisan commission with legislative leaders to think through the caucus system. Allow parties to reduce the size of the caucus in areas where participation is heavy. Parties should conduct an evaluation to determine effective caucuses. Reinvestigate the use of party research directors to brief candidates on issues important to the party.

Regarding Issues: Test the idea of using a pre-caucus one week ahead of the regular caucus. Conduct it under joint party sponsorship. Bring in experts to describe the issues and their ramifications. Then the two parties would break into their respective groups to determine their stand on the issues. Urge media coverage of the events in ways similar to the Citizens Juries sponsored by the Jefferson Center.

TABLE A-1

SUMMARY OF THE CHANGES SUGGESTED IN *SPEAK UPS*

IMPROVE KNOWLEDGE OF CAUCUS	CHANGE THE MEETING ITSELF	CHANGE CAUCUS FRAMEWORK	OTHER
•Provide major signage in and outside the caucus building	•Use professional facilitators to run the meeting	•Prevent other meetings from occurring caucus night	•Allow two or three candidates on ballot, dependent on minimum caucus support
•Provide earlier notice of caucus	•Parties should use one set of rules consistently	•Use locations consistently	•Hold non-partisan caucus for independents, focusing on issue debate
•Distribute rules governing caucus	•Test jointly sponsored pre-caucus for issue edification/discussion	•Allow parties to change size of caucus when participation is large	•Bipartisan legislative commission to rethink caucus
•Schools' civics courses ought to focus on caucus; run mock caucuses	•Eliminate debate of resolutions; hold neighborhood meeting (bi-party) for issue discussion	•Eliminate some "layers" of caucus/convention process: use only legislative district and statewide conventions	•Parties could use research directors to brief elected officials on positions
•Use video prior to caucus start to describe what can be expected	•Separate party business from rest of caucus; do at end or another time	•Hold caucuses on alternate nights -- "rolling" caucuses	•Tie parties and candidates more closely, e.g., campaign financing through parties
•State should publicize the caucus, e.g., mailing	•Do candidate selection only	•Explore use of a different day of the week	
•Reach out to invite people, particularly those who are traditionally underrepresented	•Demystify/simplify the meeting, e.g., use alternative to sub-caucusing. Make it welcoming to newcomers		
•Use media better to increase understanding of caucuses	•Shorten the platform; set party principles or mission to provide framework for platform		

## REGION 2 -- ST. PAUL NORTH

There was widespread general support for the caucuses; only minor changes were recommended. Eight people participated in the *Speak Up*, half of whom attended the 1990 caucus. All but one had attended caucuses in the past.

### Problems

The participants agreed certain problems need correcting. Problems are: the single-issue intensity of attendees; lack of openness to newcomers; it is perceived as for insiders only; caucus is too long and frustrating for certain attendees; variability in the quality of the chair running the caucus.

### Objectives

They thought greater participation is a goal. The system ought to be open for people of diverse backgrounds and allow persons in minorities to have clout. Caucuses should be used to encourage greater identity with the party and to launch candidates. They also provide a good socialization into the democratic process.

### Suggested Changes

The group suggested a pilot project of a caucus for independents that would focus entirely on issue debate (not candidate selection), as a town forum idea. Greater education about caucuses is needed, both in civics courses for students and for the general population. The state should be responsible for publicizing the caucuses, perhaps with a mass mailing that describes what goes on and where the caucuses will be held. A short amount of time should be designated at the front end of the meeting to make clear to people what will happen so expectations aren't unrealistic. Perhaps use an introductory video to kick off the meeting. The group also suggested holding caucuses on alternate nights; this would allow more people to attend, and would allow candidates to visit more caucuses to meet the attendees.

## REGION 3 -- SOUTHEAST METRO

The majority of this group agreed caucuses are important to give people a voice in the political process but said the system is not working well as now structured. Two people wanted to eliminate caucuses but felt there is little sentiment for that idea. Eleven people participated in the *Speak Up*; all but one attended the 1990 caucus.

### Problems

Greater participation is needed, particularly in suburban areas. Caucuses are symptomatic of larger societal problem of fragmentation of "communities." Candidates now make only nominal appearances. Platform is much less relevant; candidates pay them little heed. Single-issue groups have discouraged others from participating. Participating in the candidate endorsement system requires a great amount of time.

### Suggested Changes

Eliminate some of the layers of the caucus system, perhaps retain only the legislative district convention and the state convention. Explore on a pilot project basis changing the day of the caucus to a Sunday afternoon. Focus the meeting on candidate selection and separate party business from other business of caucus. A rolling caucus schedule would allow candidates to talk with participants in greater depth, although it presents administrative problems. Candidates for the primary would be chosen on the basis of the number of votes received from the earlier caucus; the top two or three who received some minimal threshold of support would go on the primary ballot.

## REGION 4 -- ST. PAUL

The group thought minor changes, not an overhaul of the system, were needed. It had 15 participants, most of whom attended 1990 caucuses.

### Problems

Republicans at the meeting said the takeover by the special interests, particularly pro-life groups, was the biggest problem. DFLers said the disorganization of the caucus itself and inability of the chair to manage the meeting are the problems.

### Objectives

The group accepted as a given the objectives such as issue discussion, electing party leadership, and selecting delegates. They were not concerned that caucuses did not represent a cross-section of the public, but were concerned that they provide access to those who choose to get involved. People yearn for debate on issues. Party business should be separated or conducted at the end of the meeting.

### Proposed changes

The state should be responsible for publicizing the caucuses, perhaps with a mass mailing. Re-orient kids to good citizenship through civics courses. Streamline the system by designating a convener with skills to run a meeting. Someone -- maybe the state, maybe the parties -- ought to provide a set of rules that alleviates the need to debate how to proceed; this should not be left to the individual caucus.

Multiple endorsements were dismissed as the "death" of the caucus. The group was split over whether to require party registration.

## REGION 5 -- DOWNTOWN MINNEAPOLIS

The consensus was that caucuses ought to be retained with minor changes. Seven people attended the *Speak Up*; five of these attended the 1990 caucus, the other two stopped attending caucuses because of poor earlier experiences.

### Problems

The process needs to be simplified; too much bureaucratic legalese. The period of time between caucus and election is too lengthy: people attending the caucus have no connection to what happens at the end of the process. Insufficient knowledge about what happens at the caucus -- people's expectations are high and are dashed at the actual event. Meetings are oftentimes not well managed.

### Objectives

Although the caucus in theory should be a community forum for issue discussion, it does not perform that objective today; the structure of the system works against this. Another objective is providing visibility to a low-visibility candidate. Ideally the caucus should be the vehicle for holding elected officials accountable. The endorsement role of the caucus should not be lost; it provides a valuable screening of the candidates prior to the primary.

### Suggested Changes

Attempt some "truth-in-advertising" prior to the caucus so people know what to expect. Eliminate from the caucus the debate of resolutions for the platform. That objective needs some other venue because caucuses are no longer a neighborhood forum for discussing the important issues of the day. Hold a neighborhood meeting so the community as a whole can discuss issues of local concern. For example, all interested could gather in one building, and after some discussion of the issues, the DFLers could go

to one room and the IRs to another to conduct their business. The independents could continue issue discussion if desired.

At the caucuses, the chair of the meeting does not need to be the precinct chair. Separate these duties if the precinct chair does not have the skills/training to manage meetings. Allow several candidates who receive minimum support at the caucus/conventions to have their name on the ballot. Shorten the time between the caucus and actual election. Some time other than a weeknight might generate better attendance.

## REGION 6 -- MINNEAPOLIS SOUTH

This group concluded that the caucus system has some problems that need to be corrected. Ten people participated in the *Speak Up*; most attended the 1990 caucus.

### Problems

Low attendance means problems in getting delegates, and in the prevalence of single interest groups. Too little in-depth discussion of the issues occurs. The procedures and high number of issues contribute to an overly long meeting. Time spent on electing party officers and reading candidates' letters could be better spent. People do not know how to plug into the process. They need to know what to expect. Caucuses suffer from poor public relations.

### Objectives

Caucuses should help people learn what others in the neighborhood are thinking. They can help educate people on issues. Caucuses can provide a supportive role to those who develop and promote issues or actions. Conducting local party business is not an objective -- it is "filler." It is not the objective of the caucus to nurture potential candidates, although this may be a spin-off benefit.

### Suggested Changes

Independents need an opportunity to voice their input on the nomination of candidates that will represent the public as a whole. Pursue the idea of multiple candidates on the primary ballot. Because of the interest in issues, focus the activities around issue-discussion. Change procedures to include more people in the process.

## REGION 7 -- MINNEAPOLIS SOUTHWEST

This group of 14 had overwhelming support for the caucus system and suggested only minor changes. Twelve attended in 1990; one did not because he was no longer affiliated with either party.

### Problems

Organization of the caucus is lacking: The skill of the chair is inconsistent. Conducting party business is tedious and boring. The caucuses are not welcoming to newcomers; they are "in-bred." Citizenry is not prepared for or educated about caucuses. Subcaucuses contribute to this problem: They take away from the objective of a town meeting for issue discussion.

### Objectives

The main objective is grass-roots political involvement. Caucuses should strengthen the parties. Perhaps the caucus tries to attain too many objectives in one night, i.e., discussing important issues, supporting candidates, and doing organizational business.

## **Suggested Changes**

Media involvement is needed to set the stage for the caucus. Better public education is needed, the Citizens League should take part in this. Additional nights for issue discussion at the neighborhood level could separate that objective from the candidate endorsement piece of the meeting. Demystify the process, be more inviting to newcomers, reach out to people.

## **REGION 8 -- MINNEAPOLIS WEST**

This group said the problems are larger than simply the "caucus." Changes must be macro in nature; tinkering with the caucus may help but is insufficient. Ten attended the *Speak Up*, all but one attended a caucus in past year.

### **Problem**

The caucus should be examined in a larger context that includes the relevance of the parties and the entire election process; therein are problems. Concerns about good government, representative government, a more enlightened electorate, and good elections will not be solved by changes to the caucuses. The micro-problems include: failure to run the meeting well, failure by the party to understand and explain the caucus to others, insufficient coverage by the media.

### **Objectives**

A caucus does not provide a good forum for issue discussion, though it should. The caucus exists for the parties' use. Because it is held only once every two years it is not as effective as it should be for conducting party business.

### **Suggested Changes**

The group believed that tinkering at the margin is necessary but insufficient to deal with the problems that are more global in nature. Changes that are contemplated should come in terms of what the party wants to get accomplished. A shorter platform, perhaps with 10 statements that set the mission for the party, would be more useful.

## **REGION 9 -- SOUTHWEST METRO**

This group agreed changes were needed so people knew what to expect from a caucus. Ten people participated in the *Speak Up*, all of whom attended a 1990 caucus.

### **Problems**

People generally build up a set of expectations about a caucus and come away disappointed. It can appear that decisions on platform positions and about candidates are made prior to the caucus. Single-issue politics dominate, and as a result caucuses have become less relevant to people. Procedures should be changed so people feel they have made an effect.

### **Objectives**

Because of demographic changes, e.g., women in the work force, people do not have the time they once had to volunteer for things; consequently, huge turnouts at caucuses should not be expected. Although caucuses should allow people to interact with candidates and open the political process to anyone who is interested, they fail to do this.



### **Suggested Changes**

Hold non-partisan town meetings, run by elected officials, to discuss and react to issues. These should occur more than once every two years. Don't use the caucus night to conduct party business. Use an orientation video to help people understand what to expect, and to allow candidates to introduce themselves. Schools could run mock caucuses to help students understand the process. Use a 25 percent threshold for selecting candidates and deciding party platform planks.

## **REGION 10 -- LAKE MINNETONKA**

Everyone in this group of 12 wanted to keep the caucus system, but everyone agreed some change is necessary. Half of the group attended a caucus in 1990 (two wanted to attend but couldn't find it; one was out of town).

### **Problems**

Concerns were voiced over the domination of the caucus by special interests, and that the caucus is overly complicated, making it mysterious to newcomers. What happens at a caucus is not widely understood.

### **Objectives**

Caucuses should: provide an opportunity to discuss issues and candidates as well as help shape government, build a strong party organization and party volunteers, and should be an open process that is not rigged or pre-programmed.

### **Suggested Changes**

The overall process needs simplification. Use of additional nights for the caucus should be explored. Better advertising of the caucuses is needed, as is better education of students about the electoral process. Multiple endorsement system should be examined; if it is a system that is perceived to be open, it will draw people in.

## **REGION 11 -- NORTHWEST METRO**

This group believed the system should be retained but with some changes. Eight people participated in the *Speak Up*; four had attended 1990 caucuses, two did not attend because they considered themselves independents.

### **Problems**

Single-issue politics are the "bane" of the caucuses. Ordinary citizens are turned off by the legalese and time spent on party organization. The endorsement process means less today because the process is manipulated by single-issue groups, because it is too time consuming and because of procedures such as the subcaucus. Because the platform from the previous cycle becomes the base for the current election, and because 60 percent of the vote is needed to make changes, the existing platform becomes somewhat fixed.

### **Objectives**

Although the caucus theoretically serves several purposes, some of the purposes are not done well. Caucuses should focus on their local dimensions. The party should articulate its philosophy in basic principles that describe what the party stands for.

**Suggested Changes**

To strengthen the political parties, caucus participants should become active with grass roots political activity. Parties and candidates should be tied more closely together, e.g., public campaign dollars should go to the parties not to individual candidates. Simplify the platform; build it around a set of basic principles that describes what the party stands for.

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **PRE-PRIMARY PARTY ENDORSEMENTS IN SELECTED STATES**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, in most states the political parties no longer have a role in designating candidates. Typically, persons become candidates by submitting petitions with the requisite number of signatures. Primary elections determine who becomes the parties' candidates running in the general election.

The parties still endorse candidates in 18 states, only seven of which have laws that formally give parties the authority to make endorsements prior to the primary election. In the remaining 11 states, including Minnesota, the parties are involved in endorsement processes that carry no legal sanctions.

Described below are five of the states where the parties retain some control in candidate selection.

#### **COLORADO**

In Colorado a convention of each party is responsible for the candidate selections. The convention is allowed a single ballot only. Candidates automatically qualify for the ballot by getting 30 percent of the convention's vote.<sup>27</sup> The size of the resulting votes determines not only whose names go on the primary ballot, but also the order in which they appear. The top name is the candidate that received the most support; in primary elections that draw relatively few voters in the first place, top line on the ballot is considered very important.

Those who fail to receive the 30 percent threshold support from the convention have another opportunity; they can get on the primary ballot if they collect enough signatures on a qualifying petition.

The endorsement system does not always result in primary elections. Roughly half of the time a primary is required. The other times the lead candidate is able to keep other candidates from attaining the support needed to force a primary.

#### **NEW MEXICO**

New Mexico had a system similar to Colorado's, but this was eliminated in the early 80s. New Mexico is now one of the many states without any party endorsements prior to the primary. When it did have the preprimary endorsement, New Mexico's system paralleled Colorado's with one exception: Candidates were required to go first through the convention process; only if they failed in obtaining the threshold support there could they qualify for the primary ballot by petition. When this process existed,

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<sup>27</sup> This threshold level was recently increased from 20 to 30 percent. The increase reduced the incidence of divisive party primaries.

the petition route was used more frequently than in Colorado; the rules governing petitions were considered to create an easier and less time-consuming process than in Colorado.<sup>28</sup>

According to one analysis of gubernatorial elections, the preprimary endorsement system had several effects in New Mexico.<sup>29</sup> Endorsed candidates more often than not won the primary. In six of the eight cases studied, the endorsed candidates in the primary were challenged. On two of those occasions the endorsed candidates lost. The primary winner received majority votes in three of the six endorsements studied. The system also succeeded in limiting the number of gubernatorial candidates in the primary.

The preprimary endorsement system was eliminated because of the dissatisfaction among those who were elected to office without getting the top line endorsement. As a result, it is not uncommon to have seven or more candidates for a single office on the primary ballot. There have also been occasions when the winner won with the largest plurality but a small percentage of the total vote.

## UTAH

Utah law encourages party contests in the primary. It requires party conventions to endorse two candidates for the primary, unless the top candidate receives 70 percent of the support, in which case a primary is not held. No other candidates may run in the primary election.

Five out of 18 contests for governor between 1948 and 1980, went uncontested at Utah's state conventions. In the remaining 13 primary elections, 10 were won by the endorsee. In only three cases did a candidate win the primary after coming in second in the endorsement.<sup>30</sup>

## NEW YORK

New York's endorsement process does not allow multiple *endorsements* per se, but does provide access to the ballot for candidates receiving minimal convention support. The parties' state central committees determine who goes on the primary ballot. At the state central committees' conventions a candidate must get a majority of the votes to get *endorsed*, but candidates automatically qualify for the ballot with 25 percent support. Other candidates can qualify for the primary ballot with petitions.

On the Democratic side, the endorsements have not been altogether successful. Endorseees are sometimes challenged, and beaten, as was the case when Mario Cuomo challenged and beat the endorsed candidate in the 1982 primary. For New York Republicans, there have been fewer challenges of the endorsed candidates. A 1982 candidate who came in second for the endorsement, challenged the endorsee in the primary but lost.

## MASSACHUSETTS

Up until 1972, Massachusetts's preprimary endorsements were statutory; now they are done informally, without the sanction of state law. A Democratic legislature abolished the convention in 1972 because it had been divisive to the party and thought to benefit Republicans. Candidates may receive party endorsement by winning majority votes at the convention. However, other candidates may also get on the primary ballot if they attain 15 percent of the support at the convention. No one may get on the primary ballot in any other way.

<sup>28</sup> Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, *The Transformation in American Politics: Implications for Federalism*, Washington D.C., 1986, p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> Malcolm E. Jewell, *Parties and Primaries: Nominating State Governors*, 1984.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

# WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

## CHARGE TO THE COMMITTEE

The committee worked in response to the following charge approved by the League Board of Directors.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: SHOULD MINNESOTA KEEP ITS PARTY CAUCUS SYSTEM?

Minnesota's party caucus system has achieved a certain hallowed status over the years. The image of thousands of civic-minded Minnesotans making their way through snow and slush to participate in the democratic process is cherished. However, that image has become somewhat tarnished in recent years.

A gap has developed between elected officials, particularly in the Legislature, and the party organizations. Legislators organize and finance their campaigns with little involvement by the official party organization.

Legislators in both political parties have expressed their concerns that the caucus system is no longer an effective way to nominate candidates and develop party positions on key issues. They point to the domination of caucuses by single-issue activists (who have occasionally rebuked incumbent legislators) and the growing number of party convention endorsements that are challenged and often overturned in the primary election.

When the Legislature convenes in January, legislators from both parties are expected to introduce bills to eliminate party caucuses and replace them with primary elections. Many observers expect these bills to succeed.

A study in this area should address:

- *What role do caucuses currently play? Are they worth saving?*
- *How can they be improved?*
- *Should other opportunities for political participation be encouraged to replace or supplement the caucuses? What role do caucuses play in promoting a sense of community, and how could that sense be created in other ways?*

Upon discussion of the issues the committee decided it would be difficult to limit its debate to only the events of the single-evening precinct caucus. Therefore, it expanded its charge to include the other steps following the precinct caucus up to and including the statewide primary election in September.

## COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Under the leadership of co-chairs John Himle and Jeff Spartz, the following 46 Citizens League members participated actively in the deliberations of the committee:

Marc Asch  
 Len Biernat  
 Bert Black  
 Luci Botzek  
 Ronnie Brooks  
 Ellen Brown  
 Douglas Carnival  
 Charles Coskran  
 John Costello  
 Patricia Cragoe  
 David Cummings  
 Keith Davidson  
 Pat Davies  
 Joseph Dixon  
 Donna Falk  
 Thomas Forsythe  
 Charles Frisch  
 Paul Gleeson  
 Martha Beery Grierson  
 Kathryn Harding  
 Dick Harmon  
 Cristy Muller Holden  
 Larry Kelley

Stephen Kelley  
 Mark Kleinschmidt  
 Edward Knalson  
 Dave Kostik  
 John Leadholm  
 Maxine Mandt  
 Allan Mulligan  
 Tharlie Olson  
 Donald Priebe  
 John Richter  
 Kathleen Ridder  
 Brad Robinson  
 Jane Shanard  
 Erika Sitz  
 Peggy Specktor  
 Mary Tambornino  
 William Tarbell  
 Parker Trostel  
 Joane Vail  
 Barbara VanDrasek  
 John Whalen  
 Kevin Wilkins  
 Donald Zibell

## COMMITTEE MEETINGS

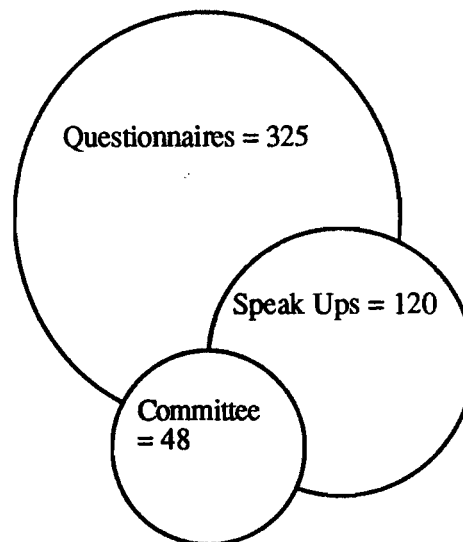
The committee met for the first time on November 28, 1990 and completed its work on January 30, 1991; it held a total of eight two-hour meetings.

In addition to the Caucus Project Report, the Board of Directors considered three minority reports submitted by several committee members. Copies of these minority reports may be viewed at the League office.

## SPECIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE CAUCUS PROJECT

Along with the study committee, the Citizens League sponsored several special activities giving League members other opportunities to participate in the caucus project. Board member Jane Gregerson oversaw this phase of the project. Members were interviewed regarding what types of activities would interest them most. Based on

### PARTICIPANTS IN PARTY CAUCUS PROJECT ACTIVITIES



those results, all members received a special issue of the *Citizens League Matters* that featured the work of the committee. The newsletter contained a questionnaire for members to use to express their opinions about the party caucus system. League members also had a chance to participate in one of 11 *Speak Ups*. These were small group meetings held in the homes of League members in many different parts of the Twin Cities region.

The Party Caucus project was an experiment in several additional ways:

While the average League study committee has 25 to 30 meetings over a six to 10 month period, the Caucus committee process was designed to be completed in eight or fewer meetings.

In order to shorten the process, there were fewer presentations by outside experts and fewer meetings for the committee to discuss what it had learned, develop its best ideas, and build consensus around those ideas. The committee was expected to quickly develop its best ideas and indicate its preferences.

Concomitantly, the League Board had a larger role in reviewing the ideas developed during the project and synthesizing them into an official League position on the issue. The Board reviewed the report of the committee as well as the results of the other special project activities, namely the *Speak Ups* and the member survey. Because of these additional components the report to the Board was quite different from a typical committee report to the Board.

## RESOURCE SPEAKERS

During the first half of its work the committee heard presentations from, and discussed issues with, the following resource persons. The Citizens League expresses its appreciation to these individuals who provided valuable help to the committee.

Hyman Berman, professor of history, University of Minnesota  
Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, co-founder, INTER-RACE, Augsburg College  
Rep. Don Ostrom, DFL-St. Peter  
Todd Otis, chair, Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor party  
Sen. Larry Pogemiller, DFL-Minneapolis  
Rep. Bill Schreiber, IR-Brooklyn Park  
Marcea Staten, senior legal counsel, Medtronic Inc.  
Barbara Sykora, co-chair, Minnesota Independent-Republican party

## ASSISTANCE TO THE COMMITTEE

This project report was prepared by Jody A. Hauer. Allan Baumgarten, Phil Jenni, Dawn Latulippe, and Joann Latulippe provided staff support and production assistance to the committee, and support for the other special activities organized on the caucus topic.

## **New research from the Citizens League**

### ***Minnesota Homestead Property Tax Review 1991*** ***Minnesota Managed Care Review 1991***

Two new research reports from the Citizens League provide useful objective information about two topics that almost everyone thinks about: property taxes and health care. *Minnesota Homestead Property Tax Review 1991* builds on the annual property tax survey done by the League for the past 25 years. It includes data and trend analysis on residential property taxes in the Twin Cities area and in cities around the state.

*Minnesota Managed Care Review 1991* provides valuable information about Minnesota's health coverage marketplace, including health maintenance organizations, preferred provider arrangements, and Blue Cross/Blue Shield. The report also analyzes key trends in enrollment, self-insurance, and management arrangements and costs. *Minnesota Managed Care Review 1991* is a valuable reference for people who need to keep up with Minnesota's dynamic health care marketplace.

League members can buy either report for \$10.00; nonmember price is \$15.00. Discounts are available for multiple copy orders. To order your copies, please use the enclosed form or call the League at 612/338-0791.

*The computer data sets developed by the League staff in preparing its analyses are also available. The property tax data set includes files of multi-year data on property tax rates, valuations, and calculations of taxes on homes of different values. The managed health care files include data on health plan enrollment, finances, utilization, etc. The sets can be used on your PCs and Macintosh computers. Call the League office for details.*

## **School Shopper Help for Parents**

### ***THE SCHOOL BOOK: 1990-91*** ***A Comprehensive Guide to Elementary Schools in the Twin Cities***

Minnesota parents who are selecting schools now have a concise source of comparative information. *The School Book, A Comprehensive Guide to Elementary Schools in the Twin Cities*, a new publication from the Citizens League, profiles 449 public and private elementary schools in the metropolitan area.

The book features information about each school's curriculum, foreign languages, building and facilities, extracurricular activities, number of students and teachers, class size, use of technology, grading system, parent organizations and communications, and services such as latchkey and breakfast. Each school profile includes a self-description of the school's teaching philosophy and strengths.

*The School Book* also includes information about what to consider when choosing a school, an explanation of Minnesota's school choice law, an application for the open enrollment program, and a Metropolitan Council map of public schools and districts in the region. You can get a copy of *The School Book* by calling the Citizens League at 612/338-0791 or by using the enclosed order form. League members can buy the book for \$10.00; the nonmember price is \$12.95.

## ***Public Affairs Directory 1991-1992 Now Available***

The Citizens League's *Public Affairs Directory* is a handy guide to the people and organizations in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors that influence and implement public policy in the state. The listings include metro area legislators as well as other key elected and appointed officials at many different levels of government. To order your copies, use the attached order form or call the League office.



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Volunteer research committees of League members study policy issues in depth and develop informational reports that propose specific workable solutions to public issues. Recommendations in these reports often become law.

Over the years, League reports have been a reliable source of information for governmental officials, community leaders, and citizens concerned with public policy issues of our area.

The League depends upon the support of individual members and contributions from businesses, foundations, and other organizations throughout the metropolitan area. *For membership information, please call 612/338-0791.*

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Citizens League



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### *Join the Citizens League and help make things happen*

#### IMPACT

Being a member of the Citizens League means you care about what happens in Minnesota and believe that good public policy depends upon an informed citizenry. League members can join citizen research committees that help to shape public policy. Membership also offers these additional benefits:

#### PUBLICATIONS

- **Minnesota Journal** — 22 issues a year of timely public affairs news, analysis and commentary, including the League's annual property tax survey.
- **Minnesota Managed Care Review 1991** -- Important information and analysis for people working in Minnesota's dynamic health care marketplace.
- **Minnesota Homestead Property Tax Review 1991** -- The League's annual analysis of residential property taxes in the Twin Cities area and other Minnesota cities.
- **Public Affairs Directory** — a handy listing of agencies, organizations and officials involved in making and implementing public policy.
- **The School Book** — a comprehensive guide to elementary schools in the Twin Cities.
- **Citizens League reports** — full reports and statements on topics studied — free copies are a benefit of membership.

#### MEETINGS

- **Mind-Opener breakfast meetings** — every Tuesday from Labor Day to Memorial Day, public officials, community and business leaders discuss and debate timely issues.



*Public affairs  
research and education  
in the Minneapolis-St. Paul  
metropolitan area*

**Citizens League**

**708 South 3rd Street  
Suite 500  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55415**