

Business and Public Policy Round Table

March 9, 2011

University Club of St. Paul

“What Should the Governor’s Priorities Be?”

Introductory presenters: Former Governor Al Quie; Former Governor Arne Carlson; Former State Senator and State Senate Majority Leader Roger Moe

Chair: Mike Harris, former CEO, Faribault Woolen Mills

Facilitator and rapporteur: Steve Young, Global Executive Director, Caux Round Table

Participants: Steve Dickinson; Tom Farnham; Tom Foley; Mike Harris; Tom Horner; Bob Junghans; Sean Kershaw; Jeanette Leehr; Deborah Montgomery; John Rupp; Fred Senn; Alan Shilepsky; Dane Smith; Asad Zaman; Al Zdrazil

Conclusions:

Governance in Minnesota and the Nation is failing. The political process cannot set forth a compelling vision for our common future and cannot take practical steps to deal with our public debts and entitlement spending. The social process cannot provide politics with leaders of vision and courage. The cultural process cannot provide citizens with common standards of right and wrong. In stressful times, too many people are running to the comforts of ideology.

The future of Minnesota and our quality of life are at stake. These are serious times and we need serious leaders. Courage and conviction to serve the common good are expected of our public officials and candidates for public office. Voters need to reward those who measure up so that everyone gets the point about what is expected.

We will not get the solutions we require from elections, political parties, fundraisers and politicians. Others must be at the table. Where are they?

Citizens must take the lead in coming together to provide a vision for the State. A consultative process of ‘congenial disputation,’ parallel to politics, must be built.

This will take time. The governor and the Republican Party majority in the Legislature are both expected to sacrifice some of their dearly held policy preferences, to listen to the facts and arguments of their opponents and to act wisely for Minnesota’s future, not to position themselves only for re-election or to curry favor with a minority point of view.

Assumption of office is not running for office. Holding a public trust is a responsibility to act for the common good, not to score points off others.

Suggestions:

1. State responsibilities should be tested against only four standards: 1) prevention of costly outcomes for society through education, wellness care, job training, job creation; 2) growing the middle class; 3) mobilizing intellectual and cultural talent for wealth creation; 4) competing internationally.
2. The acidity of partisanship must be dissolved by taking facts and proposals to the people in a state-wide campaign for their support of reforms. We need a collective change of mind. Fear should not drive our culture and shape our politics. Old values need not be lost forever, but lessons learned from the Civil Rights Movement about fairness, inclusion and having a forgiving heart should not be lost, either. Loyalty to the common good over party, ideology or self should be demanded of all. We need 'radical integrity' and aggressive collaboration.
3. The 'Big Picture' is missing. When solving a puzzle of 1,000 pieces or 100 pieces, the first step is to look at the picture on the box cover. Have a road map to a destination of excellence. Where should Minnesota be in 10 years? Who knows? We all should care. If clashing world views need to be reconciled, so be it. Reconcile them. Now.
4. We are suffering from an across-the-board trust deficit. Digital social networks convey opinions and data. They should be used more aggressively in energizing citizen responsibility. But, at the same time, they are less valuable in building trust. Face-to-face relationships are more important in restoring traditional levels of trust among Americans. They need to be re-established among our politicians.

Round table conclusions and the CRT ethical Principles for Government:

The discussion implicitly affirmed several of the CRT's ethical Principles for Government: Fundamental Principle No. 1 that public office is a public trust; General Principle No. 1 that Discourse ethics should guide application of public power; General Principle No. 4 that Security of persons, individual liberty and ownership of property are the foundation for individual justice; General Principle No. 6 that General welfare contemplates improving the well-being of individual citizens; and General Principle No. 8 that Global cooperation advances national welfare.